

How to Teach, Lead, and Live Well: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study With
Eight North Carolina Teacher-Leaders Who Flourish

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ABSTRACT

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The *embattled* profession of teaching is like a sad song on repeat (Goldstein, 2015). For beyond a decade, research has proliferated a deficit narrative of teaching as a “revolving door” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 514) or “leaky bucket” (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016, p. 2), in which at least 50% of teachers quit within the first 5 years (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). In fact, as teacher attrition increases, the teacher-shortage crisis ravages our hardest-to-serve schools (Sutcher et al., 2016). Today, the number of aspiring teachers has dropped to the lowest it has been in 45 years (Flannery, 2016).

The curiosity driving my research was and is whether it is possible to disrupt this deficit narrative of teaching as America’s most *embattled* profession (Goldstein, 2015). To do so, my goals have been to learn how eight teacher-leaders describe and understand their own flourishing in their careers, if they do at all, and what are the encouragers of and obstacles to their flourishing. In other words, rather than turn up the volume on the narrative of teachers who fail, flee, and quit the profession, I wondered how, if at all, stories exist of teachers who live, teach, and lead well.

For this study, I derived the term *flourishing* from Aristotle’s *eudemonia* or the art of living well and doing well for self and others (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095b). I then crafted the beginnings of a flourishing framework for what it might mean for teacher-leaders to live the good life. Through a cross-disciplinary and integrative literature review (Torraco, 2016), I learned that flourishing most frequently includes experiencing passion, purpose, and practical wisdom in work and life. In response, I sought to examine how, if at all, eight teachers who are

also leaders—both formally and informally in their schools and beyond—experience their own flourishing. To clarify, I defined teacher-leaders as teachers who I believe grew into leaders (Drago-Severson, 2016) and are “galvanized by the desire to improve and thus ensure learning for all students” and “driven to experiment, take risks, collaborate, seek feedback, and question their own and others’ practices” (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 64). Therefore, the eight teacher-leaders for this study fit Fairman and Mackenzie’s definition. They participated in two programs that I believe are strong *holding environments* (Drago-Severson, 2013): North Carolina Teaching Fellows, a preservice university program for aspiring teachers, and National Board for Professional Teacher Standards, an in-service development opportunity for experienced teachers with more than 4 years of experience. To be clear, “holding environments” can be relationships and contexts that create developmentally spaces for adults to grow and feel “honored for who they are” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1990). The Pillar Practices of teaming, mentorship, collegial inquiry, and inviting teachers to assume leadership are four holding environment (i.e., structures) in which adults can feel well held (supported) and adequately challenged—in order to increase internal capacities (Drago-Severson, 2004, p. 88).

I chose to invite teachers who participated in two teacher-development programs (i.e., North Carolina Teaching Fellows and National Board Certification) specifically because these programs seem to provide *holding environments*. Researchers have shown teachers who participated in these two programs are among *the best and brightest or irreplaceable* teacher-leaders whom schools want to keep, or retain, in our classrooms (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012; Jacob, Vidyarthi, & Carroll, 2012; Petty, Good, & Handler, 2016). In fact, all eight teacher-leaders who participated in this study stayed in the profession at least ten years despite the last decade of sociopolitical flux and rising complexity of public schools (Drago-Severson, 2016).

To facilitate this dissertation study, I conducted three in-depth semi-structured interviews and document analysis with each of the eight teacher-leaders who work in Wake County Public School System of North Carolina (32 hours), the 15th largest district in the nation (Hui, 2016). I asked them how they describe and understand flourishing, if they do, throughout their career, with close attention to three distinct points in the trajectory of their career, that is, in the beginning years (1-3 years), during the National Board Certification Process (during or after 4 years of teaching), and within the last academic year, which was also an election year (2016-2017). I also asked how they describe and understand the encouragers of and obstacles to their own flourishing. For data analysis, I coded verbatim transcripts from these in-depth interviews with Dedoose in two analytic cycles (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Seidman, 2013). In the first cycle, I completed open/descriptive and theoretical coding, and, in the second, I looked for categories and broader themes to display the data in narrative summaries and profiles for each participant ($n = 8$). Throughout, I attended to research bias, reactivity, and validity threats through analytic memos, member checks, discrepant data, and inter-coder reliability with my sponsor.

Findings from this qualitative in-depth interview study and document analysis contributed to a framework of understanding flourishing for teacher-leaders. Overall, I learned that to flourish, or to teach, lead, and live well, for the eight teacher-leader participants in my study, the good life meant that they needed to prioritize the purpose of relating with students ($n = 8$), as I claimed in Chapter V; cultivate connections with colleagues who share common passions ($n = 8$), as I claimed in Chapter VI; and reflect with their practical wisdom on their priority to teach *well* in the midst of the push and pull of leadership entangled in flourishing ($n = 8$), as I claimed in Chapter VII.

The implications and recommendations for policy, research, and practice from these claims and findings based on these eight teacher-leader participants are as follows:

1. to re-story *excellence* in teaching by creating teacher pipelines, development programs, and measurement tools (policy and research) that consider holistic frames of teacher excellence to include flourishing (i.e., do the teachers believe they are committed to teaching, leading, and living well?);
2. to re-center relationships in schools, especially for teachers, by intentionally crafting spaces such as *holding environments* where teachers, principals, and all educational leaders can grow their internal capacities to deepen relationships with students and colleagues; and
3. to re-frame the *tides* of teacher-leadership and consider the practical wisdom and time it takes for teachers to discern their own priorities, their own balance, and their own flow (i.e., push and pull) of leadership based on their own understanding of their ability to teach and live *well*.

In conclusion, I offer a beginning model and framework for teacher-leader flourishing in order for future research to explore how, if at all, teachers in different districts and states or of different demographics and levels might describe and understand their own good life.

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C. L. S.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

. . . to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth and resilience . . .

Fredrickson & Losada, 2005, p. 678

From high-stakes testing for students to high-stakes evaluations for teachers and principals (Ravitch, 2016), public schools are (d)evolving into dehumanized spaces (Giroux, 2013). As a result, teacher turnover is on the rise (Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015), and the teacher-pipeline is dwindling to the lowest it has been in almost 5 decades (Flannery, 2016). In my home state of North Carolina, teacher attrition rates among teachers have tripled since 2010 (State Board of Education, 2015). Now, a state that once prided itself for being “first in flight,” because of the Wright Brothers’ first airborne plane on North Carolina’s Outer Banks, produces bumper stickers that say *first in teacher flight* because of the deleterious teacher-exodus public schools are facing (Speaks, 2014; Waliga, 2014).

In light of the problem of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014), the purpose of my qualitative interview dissertation study was to learn from eight teacher-leaders who have defied the odds and stayed in classrooms in Wake County, North Carolina. My aim was to explore the profession through an evolved understanding of Aristotle’s *eudemonia*, or flourishing, a concept that implies the good life of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 202; Clandinin, 2013). To disrupt the narrative of teaching as

an embattled profession (Goldstein, 2015), I mean to identify the deficit narrative of the teaching profession as a “revolving door” (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 514) or “leaky bucket” (Sutcher et al., 2016, p. 2) and critically explore a new, strengths-based narrative and a thematic re-telling of teachers’ lived experiences. Therefore, in my dissertation study, I sought to learn how, if at all, eight teacher-leaders flourish throughout their careers with an emphasis on three transitional career points (i.e., during the beginning years [1-3 years]), while pursuing National Board Certification (>4 years), and in the last academic year (2016-2017). I also asked them how they describe and understand the encouragers of and obstacles to their flourishing, if they do at all. To clarify the language dissertation study in addition to the three data points, I next offer brief definitions of key terms previously listed.

Key Terms

In this section, I describe the key terms for this study, which are *holding environments*, *teacher-leaders*, and *flourishing*. I also offer rationales for using these terms in this dissertation. While the term *holding environment* is not in my research questions, it is a guiding principle for how I chose the *where*—Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina—and the *who*—teacher-leaders who are North Carolina Teaching Fellows and National Board Certified—for this study. The rationale listed with each key term also explains the chronological context of this study as I asked the teacher-leader participants about their experiences during the beginning years (1-3 years), while pursuing National Board Certification (>4 years), and in the last academic year (2016-2017). In Table 1, I describe the key concepts that guided my study. As well, I explain the context and detailed definitions of these terms later in this chapter and in Chapter II, Literature Review.

Table 1

Key Terms

Key Term	Definition	Rationale
Holding Environments (Pillar Practices)	Supports and challenges are possible relational structures that have been known to promote holding environments for adults who make meaning in diverse ways (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016). Specifically, I reference “holding environments,” or relationships that create developmentally optimal spaces for adults to grow and feel “honored for who they are” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). The Pillar Practices of teaming, mentorship, collegial inquiry, and inviting teachers to assume leadership are four holding environment structures and relationships in which adults can feel well held and meet their developmental capacities or “growing edge” (Drago-Severson, 2004, p. 88). The Teaching Fellows Program and National Board Certification program provide possible <i>holding environments</i> for these teacher-leaders.	For this research study, I selected teacher-leaders who participated in programs that provided holding environments to improve their growth as leaders. The foundation of holding environments derive from the adult development lens of constructive-developmental theory (Drago-Severson, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016). The fundamental question of this study was how these teachers, who have grown into leaders, flourish, if they do at all and what factors help or hinder their flourishing.
Teacher-Leaders	Teachers who seek to grow in their leadership (Drago-Severson, 2016) are “galvanized by the desire to improve and thus ensure learning for all students” and “are driven to experiment, take risks, collaborate, seek feedback, and question their own and others’ practices” (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 64; Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012; Lieberman & Miller, 2005). For this study, they also participated in two programs that provide possible holding environments for growth.	This research focused on the experience of teachers who have grown into veteran teacher-leaders as they are crucial to the success of schools and student achievement (Kini & Podolsky, 2016) and are dwindling in number with the increase in teacher turnover before teachers have time to develop as leaders, as described here.
North Carolina Teaching Fellows (NCTFs)	A highly selective program that recruits 300-400 top-performing high school students every year to teach in North Carolina public schools for 4 years within 7 years of their graduation. In return, the state pays for their school and offers specialized preservice teacher training.	All three research questions emphasize three data points and the NCTF program offers insight into what may, or may not, influence the first data point, the first 3 years of teaching, as this program prepares them to teach for at least 4 years. Additionally, NCTF provides specific supports and challenges that align with the concept of a holding environment.

Table 1 (continued)

Key Term	Definition	Rationale
National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)	The process requires 3 years of teaching experience minimum and a fee of approximately \$2,500. In this certification process, teachers have 1 to 3 years to take a standardized test in their area of expertise, record excerpts of their teaching in different styles (i.e. small group, whole group, etc.), write reflective essays critiquing their teaching, maintain logs of collaboration with parents and other teachers, and examine their accomplishments to show how these actions influence student learning and growth. Once they have submitted their portfolio of materials, teams of National Board Certified Teachers review their applications and confer the certification. In some states, like North Carolina, the certification includes a 12% raise to the teachers' salary for 10 years until the teacher must re-apply through an abbreviated process.	NBTPs offers insight into the second data point, after the fourth year of teaching, because this is the first time teachers are eligible to complete the certification. Additionally, it is the last required year of teaching for NCTFs and the point when almost 50% of teachers quit (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Therefore, teacher-leaders who pursued this certification may have had different experiences in the second data point, so it is important to understand the NBCT process. NBTPS may also provide a holding environment.
Flourishing	Experiencing <i>passion</i> , the flow and engagement people sense in their work (Conway, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fredrickson, 2009; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003); <i>purpose</i> , the meaning people attribute to their lives and relationships (Bell, 2016; Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Haidt, 2006; Hansen, 1994; Higgins, 2011; Nouwen, 2014; Seligman, 2011); and Practical wisdom or <i>phronēsis</i> (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095b), the prudence and sensitivity to context, combined with excellence in practice, that people cultivate over time (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Halverson, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Wallace, 1988).	The research question of this study sought to discover how, if at all, teacher-leaders describe and understand their own flourishing throughout their careers. To triangulate participant experiences and have a depth of understanding, an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2016) provided a foundational understanding of how to operationalize this concept for empirical purposes.

Problem Statement

The problem I addressed in my dissertation study was the rise in teacher-turnover (Sutcher et al., 2016), specifically due to dissatisfaction and lack of administrative support (Jacques et al., 2017). Indirectly contributing to this problem, teachers who stay in the classroom have been expected to endure the increasing complexity of public schools (Drago-Severson, 2016) and continual blows from dehumanizing policies (Giroux, 2013). To learn how teachers who stay move beyond simply enduring to, perhaps, flourishing, I invited eight teacher-leaders

who are NCTFs and NBCTS, in Wake County, North Carolina (NC) to participate in an in-depth interview dissertation study. In this section, I explain the problem this research addressed in three parts: (a) the rise in teacher turnover, (b) the call for teachers who stay to do more with less, and (c) the short-sighted efforts to merely sustain our aspiring teacher-leaders.

The Rise in Teacher Turnover

The first problem I addressed here was the rise in teacher turnover. Research has shown that approximately 50% of teachers quit within the first 5 years and closer to 60% leave in high-need areas (Hui & Doss, 2015; Perda, 2013; Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015). Augmenting the problem to a perceivable teacher-shortage crisis (Sutcher et al., 2016), the number of Baby Boomers entering retirement is on the rise and the number of applicants to schools of education is dwindling to lower than it has been in 45 years (Flannery, 2016; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Plus, because of the increased need for a larger teacher force, “numerically there are far more beginner teachers than before” so the actual number of teachers who quit after their first year has also “soared” (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014, p. 25). This is possibly due to a variety of entry points into teaching that have emerged within the last decade, from state-initiated lateral entry programs to national programs like Teach for America, although most research has shown that these teachers have only replaced teachers who previously held temporary licenses (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2006). With turnover still on the rise (Sutcher et al., 2016), the problem of more than half a million teachers leaving every year also costs the United States over \$2.2 billion annually (Alliance for Education, 2014; Phillips, 2015). In other words, teacher turnover has detrimental effects to the system, but, more importantly, it negatively impacts students and their achievement (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007; Carroll, 2007; Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015; Watlington, Shockley, Guglielmino, & Felsher, 2010),

especially those in low-income areas (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Although some attrition is normal, according to a meta-analysis of research in 2008, it is not always healthy and often attributed to poor working conditions or changes in career paths and could be addressed through policy and leadership (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Hui & Doss, 2015). As a result, many teachers who stay beyond 5 years must face the consequences of teacher churn, which I explain next.

The Increase in Expectations

The subsequent problem I address is that research and my own experience have shown how teachers who stay behind and stay in the classroom must work to lessen the consequences of teacher turnover, such as increased workload and rising expectations. First, teachers who are “stayers” (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014, p. 6) endure never-ending reforms, mounting responsibilities, growing needs of students, and the added hats of teacher-leadership, often without added compensation (Donaldson, 2001; Margolis & Huggins, 2012; Teacher Solutions Team, 2016). In the midst of these challenges, some teachers seem resigned to endure the changes and increasing responsibilities, which the dictionary defines as “remaining firm under suffering without yielding.” Teachers who endure in tough working conditions also embody the *fight* response to the fight-or-flight acute stress response first described by Harvard physiologist Walter Bradford Cannon (1932). He described this as a natural reaction when someone perceives harm, so book titles about enduring teachers like *Too Angry to Leave* or *The Cage Busting Teacher* suggest that teachers who stay maintain a strong *fight* response to the current demands (Hess, 2015; Quartz & TEP Research Group, 2003).

In addition to their fight to endure the rise in their workload, teachers also face increasing expectations to fight against the public school system’s manifestation of rising political issues

(Egan, 2016), from teacher empowerment (Berry, Byrd, & Wieder, 2013) to social justice and equity for all students and, now, even gun regulation. For example, the education and teaching scholar known for his inspiring hip-hop reality pedagogy, Chris Emdin (2016), challenges teachers to do damage to the system instead of to the student. Joining Ladson-Billings' (2017) push for culturally relevant pedagogy, Emdin illustrated how teachers are the ones who can and must disrupt the imperialistic status quo of public schools that causes harm, especially for our neindigenous children. Therefore, the second part of the problem is that teachers who stay must fight to endure and to lead. In response, the efforts of most school systems are merely to sustain teachers, which is the third problem addressed in this study.

The Short-Sighted Solutions

As noted above, the third problem addressed in this study is the lack of information about how to encourage the *flourishing* of our aspiring teacher-leaders. For example, teachers who strive to grow and lead (Drago-Severson, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015) must often accomplish more with fewer resources or less personal support (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009b, 2009a), just to keep up with the constant influx of change (Drago-Severson, 2016). Even though a federally-initiated and evidence-based *Teach to Lead* movement in the Department of Education in 2011 inspired many teachers to stay, the both/and work of teaching and leading can sometimes ostracize teachers, lead to conflict, overwhelm them, and include extra work that is not compensated (Gabriel, 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Margolis & Huggins, 2012; teachtolead.org, 2016; Teacher Solutions Team, 2016). Scholars have just begun to identify the struggles of teaching and leading, and this research fills that gap by asking teacher-leaders how, if at all, they flourish or live, teach, and lead well.

In summary, to partially address the problems of high teacher turnover, low teacher retention, and low teacher sustainability in an embattled profession (Goldstein, 2015), I asked eight accomplished teacher-leaders, who are North Carolina Teaching Fellows, National Board Certified with at least 10 years of experience, how they experience their own flourishing, if they did at all. In the next section, I explain the purpose of this research.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of my qualitative in-depth interview study with eight teacher-leaders was to learn how, if at all, they offer a unique and complex description and understanding of flourishing or the good life, as suggested by Higgins (2011). Specifically, I sought to explore how the concepts of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom, which I discovered in my literature review, represented intrinsic values for how these eight teacher-leaders describe and understand their life and careers. The subsequent purposes were to learn about the encouragers and obstacles they describe and understand relative to their own flourishing.

By making the purpose of my study to learn how, if at all, a group of teachers flourish, I contrasted the current measures of teachers' lives and success as dictated by test scores and school grades (Blad, 2016). While some schools have embraced the Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) requirement to include new non-cognitive or nonacademic measures for student success, like mindfulness, attendance, and spirituality, teachers still have minimal flexibility, if not more constricting limitations, in how principals evaluate them and how they see their own professional careers (Blad, 2016; Murphy, Hallinger, & Heck, 2013; Valli, Croninger, & Walters, 2007). My goal in asking about the good life, or aspects of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom in their careers, harkens back to the original musings of educational philosophers like John Dewey (1915), who believed schools could be akin to an embryonic

community life. This is similar to the current work of Teachers College, Columbia University's David Hansen's (2001, 2007, 2017), and scholars in Canada who are researching the ways schools can be "flourishing communities" (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 213). Their work, however, does not focus on teachers who are also *irreplaceable* teacher-leaders in light of the strides in understanding the complexities of adult development and the travesties of rising teacher turnover. As a result, my hope was to explore these "intellectual 'dry wells'" (Hallinger, 2013, p. 127) or gaps in the research with eight teacher-leaders in Wake County, North Carolina. In other words, I aimed to discover how teacher-leaders describe and understand their flourishing to expand the imaginings of concrete, practical, and positive ways to support teacher-leader careers.

A subsequent purpose of this research was to explore the teaching profession through the lens of flourishing in order to problematize the binary, deficit narratives surrounding teachers that proliferate the acute stress response of the *fight or flight* of teachers (Cannon, 1932; Milosevic, 2015). As Goldstein (2015) explained, the profession is hated and admired in equal proportion (Hess, 2015; Speaks, 2014; Waliga, 2014), and our current discourse detracts from the nuanced, ethical purpose of schools and teachers to liberate students as citizens in a democratic society (Dewey, 1915; Giroux, 2015; Hansen, 2000; Higgins, 2011). Therefore, this research was an effort to disrupt competitively-oriented metaphors, like teaching as an embattled profession (Goldstein, 2015), and re-focus on the factors that promote holistic schools and flourishing stories of teacher-leaders. To do so, I sought to learn how eight teacher-leaders describe and understand their own flourishing to garner insight into a new narrative of the teaching profession. The following research questions guided this study.

Research Questions

Given the above discussion, three research questions were designed to guide this study. Although I began my research exploring all three questions that I list below, I focused on the first question only to examine in detail the complexity and multifaceted nature of teacher-leader flourishing, according to the eight participants in this study.

1. How, if at all, do eight National Board Certified NC Teaching Fellows currently serving in secondary public schools in Wake County, NC, describe and understand their own flourishing (i.e., in the beginning years teaching (1-3 years), in the National Board Certification process (after Year 4), and in the last academic year (2016-2017))?
2. How, if at all, do these NC teacher-leaders describe and understand the encouragers to their flourishing?
3. How, if at all, do these NC teacher-leaders describe and understand the obstacles to their flourishing?

Personal Interest

Learn from every single being, experience, and moment. What joy it is to search for lessons and goodness and enthusiasm in others.

Eve Marie Carson, Student Body President of
UNC-Chapel Hill, 2007-2008 (1984-2008)

In this section, I explain how my experiences guided me to this topic and to these burning questions. As I have heard many scholars say, *research is me-search*, and this applies directly to this study because I especially sought to learn from teachers in my hometown. First, I explain my professional and personal reasons for this work's focus on teachers in public education. My professional reasons for choosing Wake County, NC, specifically were due to the myriad supportive programs the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2014) and

other nonprofits have offered teachers to develop into leaders and earn the national achievement of most National Board Certified Teachers in the nation. The personal reason for choosing Wake County, NC as the research site was and is my desire to give back to the school system and the teachers who educate me, still to this day.

Professional Rationale: Public Education and Teacher Advocate

My professional reason for this research is my staunch belief that all kids deserve access to a strong public education. I attended public year-round schools from kindergarten to eighth grade and then a traditional public high school in Wake County. However, it was on the cusp of *The Great Recession* that I began teaching public high school (Rich, 2013). I might not have considered a career in teaching if it were not for the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program, an initiative started in 1986 to recruit academically gifted high school students into teaching careers in North Carolina (Cohen, 2015). The program offered the 300-400 selected students a fully funded college degree to one of the 17 4-year state universities along with advanced training and diverse experiences; the state requested we teach in NC for 4 years within the first 7 years post-graduation to repay the investment. We as North Carolina Teaching Fellows (NCTFs) were recognized as some of the best and brightest teachers in the state (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). Unfortunately, many of my colleagues who graduated and began teaching after 2008 left before the end of the 4-year commitment as a result of the statewide pay-freeze, draconian cuts to public education, and lack of support from administration—reasons that align with the majority of “leavers” across the nation (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014, p. 9).

I still have a few colleagues who have stayed, which led me to the question of how, if at all, do they flourish to the point of earning their National Board Certification and staying grounded in the classroom. For me, earning my National Board Certification during my fifth year

of teaching was one of my greatest accomplishments and—apart from every other minute with my students and colleagues—one of my most rewarding learning experiences as a teacher.

Personal Rationale: A Journey of Flourishing

My rationale and interest center on my faith in the possibility of human flourishing. Although challenges abound in teaching, I discovered that the problem that held my interest was the “endangered species” of dedicated and passionate career teachers. The teacher-leaders I had as a student and worked with as a teacher were avid learners and sacrificed everything for their students, sometimes more than they did for their own kids, and they loved their jobs even when morale was exceedingly low across the state. These legends of the classroom seemed to be dwindling around me, and I wanted to know why. In my search for answers as a teacher-leader, I found Teachers College, Columbia University and Professor Ellie Drago-Severson, who guided me to understand the tremendous opportunities in researching and understanding adult development and leadership. Subsequently, the philosophy department of TC introduced me to *flourishing*. The concept, which I concretized into passion, purpose, and play for this dissertation, not only resonated deeply with my family’s vocational choices—teachers, missionaries, and nurses—but also the concept of flourishing captured the abundant life of the brilliant professional career teachers I wanted to help sustain.

Most of all, the concept of flourishing reminded me of my dear friend Eve Carson. Her life was cut short within weeks of my first day as a student-teacher. The two teenagers who shot her for gang initiation in 2008 were the same age as the students in my classroom. The synchronicity of events fused my dedication to the belief that all students, like those two young men, should have teachers who are like Eve, like the teachers I had growing up, and like my colleagues who embody human flourishing.

Assumptions of the Study

In this section, I offer a brief overview of how I addressed assumptions based on my researcher bias, positionality, subjectivities, and reactivity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maxwell, 2013).

First, to address my personal and professional assumptions or biases, I had to reflect on my positionality, so I wrote reflective memos to note both what I thought I might find in this study based on my subjectivities as a White, female, and native North Carolinian (Luttrell, 2010; Peshkin, 1988). The most salient assumptions I brought to the research were based on a shared professional history and context. Specifically, as a North Carolina Teaching Fellow and National Board Certified teacher-leader, I have my own experiences with the programs that I need to keep account of for comparison and contrast. Additionally, my familiarity with the context of Wake County Public Schools, where I was a student and teacher-leader, gave me a perspicacious understanding of the politics, personalities, and subcultures that exist within the district. I not only had to make sure I asked probing questions to check these assumptions during interviews, but also that I wrote iterative memos to note my interpretations.

A content-specific assumption I iteratively addressed was based on the nature of flourishing as somehow linked to the act of staying in the teaching profession. My assumption was that teachers who stay in the profession and who take on leadership roles must also flourish. This thinking represents a key assumption I had to question. To do so, I included some open-ended questions in my interview protocols to hear the thoughts of the participants in this study. Since no empirical studies have been conducted in this context to complement or dissuade me from this perspective other than my own experience, I paid close attention to my memos and

validity threats and included a question in my protocol to ask participants about this specific quandary.

To address reactivity, I recognized that I, as the researcher, am the tool, and interviews gave me an opportunity to learn about things “that would otherwise be closed to us,” so I was careful of the way my presence alone may have shifted the participants’ awareness (Weiss, 1995, p. 1). My gender and age may have influenced both my own interpretations of the words of the participants and the performance of my identity due to my young appearance and the history of teaching being a primarily female-gendered profession (Goldstein, 2015). Navigating these aspects of my identity, including my own position of power as the researcher, offered challenges and opportunities for me as a researcher. Finally, to attend to other aspects of validity related to interpretation, I describe the threats to descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity and how I attended to these in my research, briefly in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter III. Before I discuss my attendance to the validity threats, I give an overview of the theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

In this section, I explain the key concepts that framed this study. First, I first describe how the adult-development concept of a “holding environment” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) guided my thinking and my selection of *where* to do my research (Wake County, NC) and *who* to invite to participate (teacher-leaders). Next, I define teacher-leadership, a role that has evolved over time, and distinguish the way I operationalized it not as a role but as a teacher who participated in programs that develop leaders (Drago-Severson, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015a). Finally, I explain how I distilled and operationalized the philosophical concept of flourishing for this empirical study. I discuss these further in Chapter II.

To illuminate the structure of my conceptual framework, Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the contexts and concepts I used in my study. The left side of Figure 1 shows the national context of teacher turnover and teacher endurance. Then, I show how Wake County offers possible “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) for teacher-leaders through the teacher pipeline program of the NC Teaching Fellows and the teacher professional development program of the National Board Certification Process provided by the National Professional Teaching Standards nonprofit. To do so, the programs use structures such as the Pillar Practices, which are developmental practices employed to build internal capacity such as mentorship, tapping for leadership, collegial inquiry, and teams (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012, 2016). The arrows between the left side in Figure 1 and the right point to the curious space I explore in this research that may or may not exist between teachers and flourishing which involves purpose, passion, and practical wisdom. As Figure 1 shows, I sought to explore how a group of teacher-leaders describe and understand their own flourishing, if they do at all, and what supports or challenges help or hinder their flourishing throughout their careers.

In the first section of this overview of the literature, I explain the right side of the figure, the “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) that support the *where* (Wake County, NC) and the *who* (teacher-leaders) of this study.

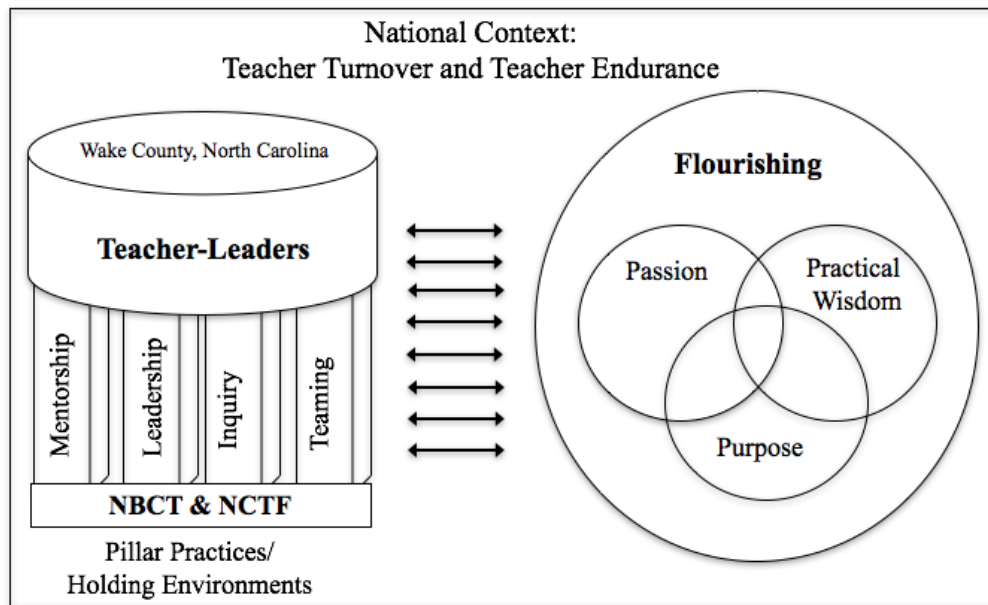


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Holding Environments

In this research, I purposefully selected the *where* and *who* of my study based on the opportunity and access for teachers to grow into leaders through “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). I wondered how these teacher-leaders would describe and understand their careers and their own flourishing, if they do at all, and the encouragers and obstacles that help and hinder their flourishing. I also asked them about distinct points in their career.

First, I define “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). D. W. Winnicott (1965), a pediatrician and psychiatrist, was the first to mention the types of care and challenges infants need to grow. Drawing from Winnicott, Kegan (1982) described *holding environments* as the psychosocial contexts or “cultures of embeddedness” (p. 115) where adults feel “well held” in their meaning-making (Drago-

Severson, 2013, p. 14). Importantly, a holding environment, or “a context in which adults feel well-held psychologically, supported and challenged developmentally, understood . . . accepted and honored” (p. 48), can exist in a single relationship, a group of people, or an organization. They serve to help people feel safe and vulnerable in ways that allow them to feel met “where they are” and comfortable in their growth (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48). “Holding environments” (p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) offer a contrast to the national context of teacher turnover, where teachers are leaving the profession mostly due to poor leadership and poor working conditions (Sutcher et al., 2016). I chose the context of Wake County because teacher-leaders could participate in possible “holding environments” to grow into leaders (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). Before explaining these possible environments further, I offer background on the foundational adult development theory that gave rise to the concept of holding environments, constructive-developmental theory (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson, Roy, & Von Frank, 2013; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000).

Constructive-Developmental Theory

To understand “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965), I employed language from constructive-developmental theory, which emphasizes the process of meaning making and centers on three concepts of constructionism, developmentalism, and the subject-object balance (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). In this subsection, I first describe ways of knowing and internal capacities. Then, in the next subsection, I explain their importance relative to “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) and the Pillar Practices.

Ways of knowing and internal capacities. Research has shown that people make meaning in fundamentally different ways, or *ways of knowing*, and that appropriate supports and challenges assist the growth and development of how people can expand their way of knowing and *internal capacities* (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). Growth, according to this theory, involves increasing a person's internal capacities along four lines of development—in other words, increasing the interpersonal, intrapersonal, cognitive, and affective meaning-making systems that help individuals manage varying complexities (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000).

A world-renowned scholar in adult leadership and adult development, Dr. Eleanor Drago-Severson discerned from her research that three main adult stages of meaning-making are most prevalent in adulthood. She calls these the instrumental, social, and self-authoring *ways of knowing*, which require different developmentally appropriate supports and challenges to help adults feel secure and stretched to grow. Each way of knowing has both strengths and limitations. While employing these concepts in-depth in this study (i.e., assessing each participant's way of knowing) was outside the scope of this study, I review them briefly next.

Instrumental knowers, one type of knower, make meaning through concrete terms and see others as either on their side or not (Drago-Severson, 2009). They tend to be “rule-bound” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 43) and their strengths are their detail-oriented and hands-on approach. Next, socializing knowers tend to have a capacity to work in a less concrete and more integrated way as they focus on others' approval and societal expectations of them. A developmental capacity of these knowers lies in their cooperative nature, but their limitation is

that conflict literally feels like as if it is tearing them apart (Drago-Severson, 2009). Finally, self-authoring knowers tend to have a value-focused self, are interested in their independence, and are embedded in their own ideas. One internal strength for individuals with this way of knowing is their ability to handle conflict, especially as leaders; meanwhile, their area of growth is their inability to “critique” their own “practices and vision” (p. 49).

Adults with these *ways of knowing* require qualitatively different developmental supports and challenges because they have diverse ways of making meaning. This study did not focus explicitly on the participants’ differing developmental capacities or ways of knowing. Instead, with this knowledge of adult development, I considered the importance of the different environments that are inclusive of all *ways of knowing* in order to think about developmental intentionality relative to holding environments or Pillar Practices (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012, 2016). I explain these developmentally inclusive environments, or Pillar Practices, next.

Pillar Practices. Pillar Practices (i.e., teaming, collegial inquiry, mentoring, and tapping for leadership) can be types of *holding environments* when implemented with developmental intentionality, or awareness of the qualitatively different ways adults make meaning (Drago-Severson, 2009). I selected North Carolina as the *where* because the state and the district of Wake County offer programs that, from my perspective, offer “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) for teachers to grow into leaders. This was important because my research question asks teachers who have become leaders how they describe and understand flourishing throughout their careers. The next section describes the structures and relationships that define a holding environment, specifically through engaging in the Pillar Practices.

In schools, Drago-Severson (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016) describes that these holding environments are especially important as the systems, demands, and expectations grow more complex. Therefore, she offers the Pillar Practices as relational structures that help support and challenge adults with different ways of knowing because they are, in essence, holding environments. In Chapter II, I explain more about the details of each Pillar Practice, which are mentoring, teaming, tapping for leadership, and collegial inquiry. These practices can be employed to offer developmentally different supports for insight into some of the encouragers or obstacles teacher-leaders may describe relative to their own flourishing, if these teachers do at all. As noted earlier, given the complexity of flourishing according to the eight teacher-leaders in this study, I chose not to include the participants' insights into the encouragers or obstacles of their flourishing (i.e., Research Question 1 and 2) although their responses are present in my data.

In the next section, I offer a general overview of teacher-leadership. Then, I explain how I operationalized teacher-leaders as teachers who have participated and possibly grown into leaders through programs that provide *holding environments* like the North Carolina Teaching Fellows and National Board Certification. These ideas are also elaborated on Chapter II.

Teacher-Leadership

Teacher-leadership is a term I used to define the roles and work of the participants in this study. First, on a national level, it is important to note that not all teachers who stay in the classroom lead, but as former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan said in 2014, "Teacher leadership is not a nicety—it's a necessity" (teachtolead.org, 2014). John King, the 2016 Secretary and Teachers College alumnus, echoed his sentiment when he stated, "We don't just

want educators to be part of the necessary change—we need them to lead it” (teachtolead.org, 2016).

Teacher-leadership is necessary now more than ever and the type of leaders we need has evolved. Heifetz (1994) identified this sort of challenge of leadership as an *adaptive challenge*, or challenges without clear answers or solutions that usually require changes in norms and culture. Because of the onslaught of changes facing schools, the act and role leadership has become adaptive challenges—for teachers and educators across the system (Drago-Severson, 2016). To be clear, adaptive challenges are problems “for which neither the problem nor the solution is clearly known or defined” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 309, see Heifetz, 1994), in contrast to technical challenges, which are clearly defined problems with clear solutions (Drago-Severson, 2009). Both of these challenges exist in schools, yet as adaptive challenges increase, the need for greater internal capacities in individual across the system grows (Drago-Severson, 2016)—hence the importance of focusing on understanding the perspective of teacher-leaders.

For this study, I defined teacher-leaders as teachers in Wake County public high schools who are participated in *holding environments* such as the NCTF and the NBCT. Membership in these two programs narrowed the pool of teacher-leaders, as research has shown that both programs intentionally commit to growing leaders and producing teachers who lead through high test scores and extensive involvement in leadership (Belson & Husted, 2015; Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012; Petty et al., 2016; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2013). Although NCTF and NBCTs existed before the *Teach to Lead* directive from the U.S. Department of Education, the teachers from these two programs epitomize teacher-leadership because they work hard to be purposeful architects of student and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Petty et al., 2016). It is important to note that the

term *teacher-leaders* has a long history and multiple factors, traits, roles, and so on that often distinguish them from other teachers, as I explain in Chapter II (Drago-Severson, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Lai & Cheung, 2015; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Ultimately, for this study, the definition of teacher-leadership was teachers who are “galvanized by the desire to improve and thus ensure learning for all students” and “are driven to experiment, take risks, collaborate, seek feedback, and question their own and others’ practices” (Drago-Severson, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 64).

In the next section as well as in Chapter II, I offer a distilled breakdown of the concept of flourishing used in this study. Through an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2016), I discerned teacher-leaders might describe flourishing through the possible categories of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom.

Flourishing

In this section, I first explain the historical origins of flourishing within philosophy and then describe its presence in empirical research in education leadership and positive psychology. Next, I clarify how I offer purpose, passion, and practical wisdom as implied aspects of the good life with eight teacher-leaders in public high schools in Wake County, North Carolina.

Historical Origins

Flourishing appears in multiple disciplines from philosophy to psychology, yet in the social sciences, scholars have only begun to explore its meaning. Aristotle introduced *eudemonia*, which most loosely resembles human flourishing, although often scholars translate it as happy. While happiness suggests an ephemeral emotion, flourishing guides the soul to deep reflection and imports the act of serious introspection into the self’s impact on others (Fredrickson, 2006). Asking the teleological question of what is our ultimate function and how

do we fulfill this, the Aristotelian interpretation links *eudemonia* to virtue or *arête* and suggests that *living well and doing well for self and others* avail humans to connected lives of self-care and service to others (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095a). In other words, these virtue ethics are “optimistic in outlook, connecting what is meaningful or valuable with what it is to flourish as a human being” and “cannot be understood without reference to other individuals with whom we engage, the institutions in which those engagements takes place, the traditions that inform those institutions and so on” (Lavery, 2005, p. 194). For centuries, philosophers have grappled with the methods of flourishing relative to the concept of life and work. In this dissertation, I drew from Higgins (2011) and translated his lingering questions into qualitative research with eight teacher-leaders to see how, if at all, they describe and understand their own flourishing in their careers and whether teaching is a way to realize the good life.

Multidisciplinary Approaches

Outside of philosophy, education leadership researchers have also embarked on the question of learning how those in schools may flourish. For example, through a survey with about nine principals, the themes of purpose, passion and practical wisdom arose as necessary to create a flourishing community, a space where students and teachers belong and thrive (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016). Likewise, a qualitative interview study conducted by Conway (2012) discovered that 11 tenured professors in higher education flourished when they were able to “cultivate their passions, engage in the community, de-emphasize struggle, and integrate joy in their work” as faculty (p. 3).

Interestingly, while social scientists have explored flourishing in communities, psychologists have pathologized the concept in the field of positive psychology through well-being theory, positivity, flow, resilience, grit, presence, and other individual characteristics and

traits that they believe lead to human flourishing (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Cuddy, 2015; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). These researchers also crafted international scales to discern whether people all over the world flourish (Keyes, 2002).

Throughout this review of multidisciplinary literature, not limited to philosophy, education leadership or positive psychology, the common themes in flourishing include a dynamic way of living that ties together the threads of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom as recently offered by principals in Canada as necessary for “flourishing communities” (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 200). However, for my study, I synthesized the literature from several additional disciplines to offer that flourishing embodies the following concepts: *passion*, the flow and engagement people sense in their work (Conway, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fredrickson, 2009; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003); *purpose*, the meaning people attribute to their lives and relationships (Bell, 2016; Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Haidt, 2006; Hansen, 1994; Higgins, 2011; Nouwen, 2014; Seligman, 2011); and practical wisdom or *phronēsis* (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095b), the prudence and sensitivity to context that cultivates discernment and excellence in practice over time (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Halverson, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Wallace, 1988). In the next section, I discuss these concepts in further detail, with an in-depth integrative review in Chapter II (Torraco, 2016).

Passion

The concept of *passion* includes the experience of flow and the complex nature of vital engagement in the work teachers do (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Conway, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Positive psychology takes center stage in reviewing *passion* as a

concept separate from a moral purpose and explores positive mindsets and behaviors under the umbrella of passion like grit, gratitude, growth-mindset, and optimism (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014; Duckworth et al., 2007; Dweck, 2008; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Peterson & Chang, 2003).

Purpose

Tightly linked to passion, the concept of *purpose* as a part of flourishing involves the moral, ethical, and spiritual meaning people attribute to their lives and relationships (Bell, 2016; Dorrien, 2011; Han, 2015; Higgins, 2011; Lambersky, 2016; Nouwen, 2014). An important aspect of meaning and purpose must also include the self-efficacy and ability to pursue purpose and meaning, which culminate in the concept of following one's calling or vocation (Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, & Malone, 2006; Hansen, 1994, 2007; Klassen, Usher, & Bong, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012). Because purpose is a multifaceted, multilayered concept, I aimed to learn from eight teacher-leaders how, if at all, purpose may be an important thread of their flourishing throughout their careers.

Practical Wisdom

Practical wisdom or *phronēsis* (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095b) is the prudence and sensitivity to context that cultivate discernment and excellence in practice over time (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Halverson, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Wallace, 1988). This virtue is essential to purposeful reflection in addition to framing and solving problems (Halverson, 2004). As philosopher MacIntyre (2007) suggested, this is not a virtue that can be taught. Instead, it is a value that people learn over time as they work to achieve their teleological purpose or become their best self (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006). Importantly, according to Aristotle, *phronēsis* is a moral wisdom that “the possession of which is a prerequisite” for all

other virtues (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 183). Thus, for this dissertation, practical wisdom is teacher pragmatism in which teachers cultivate through reflective practice, critical praxis, and discernment in problem solving.

Although these are the parts of the whole concept of flourishing, the gestalt of flourishing for this study was open-ended and elusive, which is why my first research question explored how, if at all, the teachers understand their purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and practical wisdom at three different points in their career, that is the beginning years (1-3), while earning their National Board Certification (>4), and in the last academic year (2016-2017). Although I gleaned the meaning of flourishing from salient literature, I kept the operationalization of the concept broad because I sought to understand how these teachers would describe their stories and provide nuanced and divergent perspectives of flourishing. The phrase *if at all*, as listed in all three research questions, was crucial to my study because it drew attention to the possibility that teachers-leaders may not flourish.

Methodological Overview

In this section, I outline my study's design and my choice of a qualitative approach and in-depth interview methodology. I discuss my methods more fully in Chapter III, explaining the decisions I made throughout the research process. By way of review, I planned to conduct a qualitative in-depth interview study (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013) to learn how eight teacher-leaders in Wake County, North Carolina describe and understand their own flourishing, if they do at all, at three different points in their career. I focused on the first research question and how they describe and understand their own flourishing rather than exploring what I learned for the second and third research questions (the encouragers of and obstacles to their own flourishing). I

zoomed in on this first research question because of the complex and comprehensive discussion the participants offered.

First, I explain my reasoning for choosing a qualitative approach; then, I describe the selection criteria for field setting and participants, the data collection methods, the consent procedures, and my choices for participant sampling and attending to confidentiality. Finally, I illuminate the data analyses procedures and address validity threats and the limitations and significance of the study. These are further explained in Chapter II. In this section, I refer to several appendices that offer specifics such as Interview Protocol #1 (Appendix A), Interview Protocol #2 (Appendix B), and Interview Protocol #3 (Appendix C).

Research Design

My epistemological stance connected to the interpretive framework of constructivism, the perspective that reality is constructed with subjective meanings (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). Unlike quantitative studies, I sought to attain a rich story full of description from participants who allowed me to collect and analyze concrete, contextualized stories from their perspective (Maxwell, 2005). As a result, I administered qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews because they allowed me to “listen to the explicit descriptions and to the meanings expressed, as well as to what is said ‘between the lines’” (Kvale, 2009, p. 32). Given the nature of flourishing as an unexplored phenomenon for teacher-leaders, I adapted Seidman’s (2013) phenomenological in-depth interview style with three 60-90 minute interviews.

Selection of Site

In this section, I explain my rationale for the site I selected for my research as it pertains to understanding how teacher-leaders describe and understand their own flourishing and the encouragers of and obstacles to their flourishing, if they do at all. As a brief overview of the

criteria, I chose school sites that were public, secondary schools in Wake County, NC with a high concentration of possible participants. Next, I discuss my justification for choosing these criteria.

Criteria and rationale for site. I could have chosen any public, private, or charter school to conduct this study; however, my goal was to capture the lived experience of public school teachers as I believe they uphold Dewey's (1915) ideal that "What the best and wisest parent wants for his child, that must we want for all the children of the community" (p. 3), because traditional public schools open their doors to all children. As a result, the first criterion for my site was public schools. Although the results are not generalizable to the entire U.S. population of teacher-leaders because of the small sample size, I was not concerned with generalization. More specifically, I was concerned "with developing an adequate description, interpretation, and explanation of this case" specific to the following criteria (Maxwell, 2013, p. 71). I also chose secondary public schools because I was personally familiar with this level of school and had a strong understanding of the multiple opportunities for teacher leadership and complex structures that incorporate PLCs, school improvement teams, and the like (DuFour & Eaker, 2005).

In short, I chose the Wake County District in North Carolina because of familiarity and because it has the highest number of National Board Certified Teachers and North Carolina Teaching Fellows (NCDPI, 2014; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2016; Wake County Public School System, 2016). Both are highly focused programs that provide *holding environments* for teacher leadership (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). Importantly, I grew up and taught in Wake County, and so I chose this site to give back to the social context that helped me develop and become a teacher-leader.

Descriptively, the Wake County Public School system is the largest school district in the state and the 15th largest in the nation (Wake County Public School System, 2016). It is also the location of North Carolina's capital, Raleigh, and has 26 public high schools.

Although 26 possible high schools with teacher-leaders fit my criteria of public high schools in the Wake County Public School District, I sought to select schools with homogeneity across contexts in order to pay attention to the diversity of individual lived experiences (Miles et al., 2014). By "homogeneity," I wanted to focus on schools with similar social characteristics such as comparable population numbers, free and reduced lunch, faculty size, and so on (Miles et al., 2014, p. 32). I was also aware that gatekeeping and access were concerns (Berg & Lune, 2011), so I emailed the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources in advance to learn if the district would permit my research (Appendix D, Letter to Informant). The Assistant Superintendent introduced me to the IRB coordinator of Wake County who confirmed that after receiving IRB approval from Teachers College, Columbia University, they would review my application. In our meeting, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources voiced that he thought my research aligned well with their 2020 school vision. I also networked to meet leaders in the Public School Forum who were able to send me a list of NC Teaching Fellows because I am one. From this list, I cross-referenced to teachers who were also NBCT-certified. I was then able to see how many teachers fit both criteria in almost all 26 high schools

Possible school sites. From the list of possible participants received from the North Carolina Public School Forum, I narrowed the 26 schools to six possible sites that had similar characteristics of more than 100 teachers, more than 2,000 students, a student body in which more than 15% received Free and Reduced Lunch, and the most possible participants to choose from (rather than just one in one school). Table 2 shows the approximate demographics of the six

schools. To protect confidentiality, I used random numbers and approximate ranges for the schools.

Table 2

Possible Sites (2015-2016)

School Name	Number of Students	Number of Teachers	Free and Reduced Lunch	Performance Composite
School 1	2,300	120	15%	>70%
School 2	2,400	140	35%	>70%
School 3	2,600	150	45%	<50%
School 4	2,400	130	20%	>70%
School 5	2,400	140	35%	<70%
School 6	2,000	110	30%	>70%

From the list of possibilities in Table 2, I started with three schools that had homogeneity, or the most similar demographics regarding approximate school size, highest percentage of free and reduced lunch numbers, and lower performance composite (i.e., Schools 2, 3, and 5). I specifically chose these factors because of their similarity to research that showed that the factor of increased student poverty often increases teacher turnover (Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015). Because I did not receive enough participants from the first three schools, I then asked for teacher-leaders from School 4 as well.

In summary, the following criteria helped me narrow the options to choose my field sites for participants that I invited to participate voluntarily in my research:

1. public high schools,
2. Wake County Public School System, North Carolina,
3. similarity/homogeneity of demographics, and
4. high concentration of potential participants.

I discuss these potential sites and methods of selecting settings in greater detail in Chapter III. Next, I explain how I chose the participants for my qualitative interview study.

Selection of Participants

In this section, I describe my rationale and criteria for selecting the participants (teacher-leaders) and explain the informed consent.

Criteria and rationale. Overall, Wake County Public School system has approximately 10,225 teachers (Wake County Public School System, 2016). Additionally, of those teachers in the public school district, 591 teachers fulfill both criteria of participating in the NC Teaching Fellows and National Board Certification in the Wake County Public School System (Wake County Public School System, 2016). As a reminder, I had four criteria for selecting teacher leaders to interview that yielded the eight final participants (also see Chapter III):

1. high school/secondary school teacher,
2. at least 10 years of experience,
3. identified by criteria as teacher-leader (NBCT and NCTF), and
4. originally located in the schools listed in Table 2.

I chose these programs to help me narrow the pool of teacher-leaders because my definition of teacher-leaders were individuals who have taken risks and sought feedback to grow into leaders (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Participation in these two programs highlighted their active transitions into becoming teacher-leaders as research has shown that these programs support teacher growth (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012; Petty et al., 2016). As mentioned, of the 591 possible NBCTs and Teaching Fellows, 54 are in secondary public schools. To capture teacher-leader veterans who have endured the political changes of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTT), I narrowed the pool to teacher leaders who taught for at least 10

years because they experienced The Great Recession and the most recent adaptive challenges in North Carolina, such as draconian budget cuts and the onslaught of testing and new policies (Rich, 2013; Speaks, 2014). This led to 26 possible teachers.

Although I would have liked to invite and interview all 26 teachers, since this is the first phase of what I hope will become a longer-term research project, I initially invited 12 teachers into my study, knowing there may be some attrition. To do so, I purposefully invited three to four teacher-leaders from the first three schools (see Appendix E, Informed Consent, and Appendix F, Invitation to Participate). My goal was to have at least 8-12 participants complete all three interviews. Because School 3 did not yield any participants, I invited an additional set of participants from School 4. In total, I invited 17 participants which ultimately yielded eight teacher-leaders from four schools who responded they could participate (one teacher moved to a new school in Wake County since the data collection).

As with gatekeeping for the site, my hope was that my familiarity with and similarity of experiences between the participants and myself (earning our National Board Certification and going through the NCTF) would build rapport (Maxwell, 2013, p. 66). This was also a possible limitation, however, as I had some subjectivities and researcher biases based in my own experience. I discuss these possible limitations and validity threats more in Chapter III (Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2013).

One limitation worth noting was that I realized after my first round of interviews that I had all White participants. I attempted a snowball sample strategy to learn if there were participants of color who met these criteria. In the short timeframe I had allotted for interviews, I was unable to find new participants, so the eight participants were the result of purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013).

Again, although I would have liked a variety of gender, race/ethnicity, and age, I was not privy to all demographic information, so a comparative understanding based on the intersectionality of identities currently falls beyond the scope of this study. This was the most disappointing limitation to my study as race/ethnicity was among the goals of diversity with the NCTF. Similarly, conducting Subject-Object Interviews (Lahey, Souvaine, Kegan, Goodman, & Felix, 2011) to understand each participant's way of knowing (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000) was also outside the scope of my research. Ideally, though, inviting participants from a variety of subgroups, both relative to race/ethnicity and ways of knowing, is an ideal next step in gathering more insight into the meaning making of participants or purposeful diversity of experiences.

Data Collection

In this section, I preview my methodology for collecting data and analyzing data. I explain these in more detail in Chapter III.

My primary method for collecting data was qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews which assisted my learning “about settings that would be otherwise closed to us” (Weiss, 1995, p. 1). In this way, the interviews embraced the constructive nature of knowledge “through the interaction of the partners in the interview conversation” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 11). For this study, I adapted Seidman's (2013) three in-depth interviews that last 60-90 minutes (see Appendix A, Interview Protocol #1).

In-depth interviews. The goal of the first in-depth interview was to understand the participants' background and context, an adaption of Seidman's (2013) *life histories*, and I asked for general reflections of experiences and narratives regarding the journey to teaching and the context, including experiences of flourishing, if any, of their first 3 years as a teacher (see

Appendix A, Interview Protocol #1). I asked participants to choose a location, so I could conduct the first interviews in person. Due to financial restraints, some of the first interviews were conducted with FaceTime instead of in person. I also asked them to send their National Board Certification documents before the next interview (see Appendix A, Interview Protocol #1).

In the second interview, called “Flourishing Experiences,” I dove deeply into the first research question to understand how each participant described and understood his or her own flourishing and any experiences of this during their National Board Certification Process (>4 years) (see Appendix B, Interview Protocol #2). I originally hoped to cover the most recent year of teaching as well, but because several teachers went beyond 25 years, many not only passed their boards but also renewed them again 10 years later. I conducted this interview over phone primarily, and I asked participants questions that aligned with my second research question about the encouragers and obstacles they experienced during their National Board Certification process and/or their renewal, which must happen within 10 years of first receiving the honor. I also asked questions related to the third research question about how the supports and challenges that helped or hindered their own flourishing (see Appendix B, Interview Protocol #2).

In the third and last interview, I reviewed their last year of teaching and used questions pertaining to the three research questions (see Appendix C, Interview Protocol #3). Then, I posed purposeful reflective questions that I called “Focused Reflection” during interview #3 (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2013). This interview was in person or by phone or Skype, depending on schedule. Due to the limited timeframe, I scheduled a subsequent conversation to complete member checks, if they desired, which was an opportunity to check my own deep listening and understanding with their meaning making of their experiences. This is

described further in Chapter III because this acts as an opportunity for an interpretive validity check (Maxwell, 2013).

Document collection. In addition to these interviews, I collected documents and analyzed them for seven of the eight participants. One participant had deleted all her files and thrown them out due to a home renovation. More specifically, I collected and reviewed any documents participants shared related to their entry into their National Board Certification Process, any journal entries from teaching they were willing to offer, entries for Teacher of the Year competitions, and any school or published materials to understand better the personal and social context of each participant (Maxwell, 2013). I did this after the first interview. I also requested that they send any other documents they believed might provide insight into their experiences in their teaching career.

Data Analysis

I used multiple analytical approaches throughout because analysis is an iterative process (Maxwell, 2013). I review the process below and explain all of these steps in Chapter III. My analytic steps included:

1. writing analytic memos after each interview to capture my initial connections, reactions, and reflections (Maxwell, 2013);
2. recording and transcribing interviews verbatim via a third-party, such as Upwork, and then reading back each transcript against the audio recording to check the accuracy of the transcript and attend to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013);
3. uploading transcripts and documents to Dedoose, a digital qualitative analysis software. The choice to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was because it assisted with data management; however, I remained aware of potential

- downfalls such as coding too quickly or overcoding (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2013);
4. coding transcripts (first cycle) using open, or descriptive, or inductive coding (Miles et al., 2014) to highlight the participants' voice and potentially discover emerging ideas or explanations that were contrary to my assumptions or the current literature (interpretative validity, Maxwell, 2013). In addition to finding emic or emerging codes, I looked deductively for theoretical or etic codes from the literature (Miles et al., 2014) (see Appendix G, Preliminary Codes);
 5. organizing and categorizing data (second cycle) in larger themes using both within-case and cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2013) (see Appendix H, Preliminary Code List);
 6. displaying data and write narrative profiles, contextualized and categorized (Maxwell, 2008), of teacher-leaders with anecdotes and vignettes that capture their own flourishing, supports, and/or challenges (Seidman, 2013), then using additional data displays, matrices, tables, and concept maps to draw out themes (Miles et al., 2014).

To clarify, Seidman's (2013) analytic procedures include first condensing the text to select interesting passages to create profiles of individual participants (p. 121). As he advised, I trusted myself as the reader and created working profiles, or stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end and "using the participants words to reflect the person's consciousness" (p. 122). Also, to create each profile, I coded and labeled transcripts with open and verbatim coding, and selected all passages I found important to create a new—and reduced—version of a single transcript to illustrate the participants' meaning making of a particular theme important to each person, with a mini-narrative in first-person. Next, I analyzed and categorized the codes to find

common themes among participants, which Seidman divided into three overarching steps: description, analysis, and interpretation (p. 130). As mentioned, after the initial rounds of descriptive coding with Dedoose, I paid special attention to the categories and combined them with related codes into broader categories and themes (Maxwell, 2013). Iteratively, I also wrote three types of analytic memos—thematic, theoretical, and positional—to capture both personal subjectivities as a former teacher leader and emerging patterns (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). I explain these in greater detail in Chapter III.

Validity

In this section, I explain how I attended to my biases and the validity threats to the study in the research design and my interpretation of the data (Maxwell, 2013). Given the nature of qualitative research, validity is not a verification of soundness and objectivity, but it is “built into the research process with continual checks on the credibility, plausibility, and trustworthiness of the findings” (Kvale, 2009, p. 242). In fact, as systematically as possible, I first describe how I attended to researcher bias, then addressed reactivity (Maxwell, 2013). Chapter III describes more specifically how I paid attention to descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity.

Researcher Bias

To examine researcher bias, which are the preconceptions and existing theories I bring to the research, I wrote analytic memos to examine my assumptions, my identity, my experiences, and my reactions to participants (Maxwell, 1996, 2013). I believe I cannot be objective in this research; however, I was mindful of my assumptions throughout the process of interviews and data analysis by writing memos to track my thinking and assumptions. This was especially important because I was personally familiar with the sites where I was raised and the district where I and my participants teach. I also tried to be aware of as many visible and invisible

characteristics I brought to the study, as well as my history and experiences, which elevated the possibility that I might shape the data to fit my own experiences. Maxwell (2013) noted that it is important for qualitative researchers to understand how our “particular values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions for the study” (p. 124). For example, to be aware of my subjectivities, I wrote analytic memos to critically examine my position, my coding strategies, my coding judgments, and so on and consistently asked questions of the data to maintain sensitivity to how my assumptions affected my interpretations of the data.

Reactivity

As a researcher, I had the subtle power to influence the setting and the individuals in my research setting. Also known as “reflexivity” in interviews, I addressed my unavoidable influence by asking the participants to choose settings that were familiar to them and by not using any leading questions during the interviews (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). As a result, since I can never remove my influence from the study, I tried to use my insights productively by being aware of my personal experiences and any visible or invisible subtexts in the interviews and transcripts. I took the time to talk with my participants about what may be visible and invisible in the words and my interpretations through the process of member-checking in the third interview.

Finally, I did my best to address descriptive, interpretive, and theoretical validity in my study. As further discussed in Chapter III, I first attended to descriptive validity, which is the possibility of “inaccuracy or incompleteness of the data” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 89; Maxwell, 2013). To attend to this, I recorded full-length interviews and coded verbatim transcripts in addition to writing detailed notes of my observations during the interviews. Additionally, to address possible interpretive validity, or the threat of imposing my own framework on the participants’ words and meaning making, I conducted member-checking by reviewing my interpretations of the

transcripts with them during the third interview (Maxwell, 1996, 2013). For this process, I also gave the participants the verbatim transcripts and asked them to address any parts they felt misrepresented or were missing. Thus, I could attend to researcher bias and any threats to the interpretive validity of my analysis in process. As for theoretical validity, I searched for and analyzed not only confirming evidence but also disconfirming evidence, or discrepant data. In addition, I constantly asked myself what may be missing from the data or what could disprove my explanations and understandings (Maxwell, 2013).

Limitations

Here, I explain the limitations to my study or ways that my choices gave boundaries to what was feasible in this specific research.

First, as noted, due to my small sample size, this study is only generalizable to the sample—internal generalizability (Maxwell, 2013). With only eight participants, my hope was to dive deeply into their lived experiences and learn how they make meaning rather than a survey of a larger number. Alternative methodologies were also available, even with eight participants, such as case studies or narrative inquiry; therefore, my choice of in-depth interviews limited the type of information to those in-depth discussions rather than data culled from observations and long-term time commitments. Unfortunately, these limitations also did not give me time to search out racial or ethnic diversity among the participants, so a major limitation of this small pool is that all participants were White.

I also narrowly defined my terms such as *flourishing* and *teacher-leader*, which assisted me in analyses but also limited my findings to the group of eight teacher-leaders who were North Carolina Teaching Fellows and National Board Certified in North Carolina public high schools. Theoretically, the complexity of these concepts, in addition to the use of supports and challenges

of constructive-developmental theory, allowed me to pay some attention to the diversity among the participants. However, I would have needed to perform Subject-Object interviews (Lahey et al., 2011) to address developmental diversity or *ways of knowing*, as mentioned earlier (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). In fact, a subsequent study to explore identity politics related to gender, race, and other dimensions of intersectionality of experiences or the possibility of links between social justice and flourishing are elements that hold promise for future work but were beyond the scope of this study.

Additional limitations were the scarce resources of time and money within the doctoral program. With more of both, I would have been to extend this study to a larger group of participants and facilitate focus groups and, eventually, participatory action research. For this study, I sought to understand the lived experiences of a group of teacher leaders in Wake County public high schools.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the overall research design for my qualitative, in-depth interview study, offered brief descriptions of key terms, and clarified the research questions that guided this study. I also explained the literature and theory that framed this study in addition to the *who* (teacher-leaders) and the *where* of my study (Wake County, North Carolina). Chapter II describes the literature in greater detail and Chapter III presents the methodology. In Chapter IV, I introduce my participants. Chapters V, VI, and VII discuss the findings to the first research question, and Chapter VIII offers a discussion and conclusions to my study.

Next, in Chapter II I present more detail about the literature that guided and framed most of my decision making throughout this research.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I explain the theory, literature, and experiences that informed the conceptual framework for my dissertation study of eight teacher-leaders in Wake County, North Carolina. I begin with an overview of my approach to the literature in order to craft a conceptual framework for this research (Maxwell, 2013; Torraco, 2016). I next give an overview of the framework.

First, I place the teachers within the national context and then situate the participants within the current issues of teacher turnover and teacher endurance. Next, I explore the local context of teacher-leaders and the evolution of teacher-leadership, with a focus on Wake County, interchangeable with the Wake County Public School System and North Carolina, as I believe these provided “holding environments” to contrast the national context (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). To better describe holding environments within the local context, I explain the fundamentals of constructive-developmental theory, with an emphasis on the Pillar Practices (i.e., mentoring, tapping for teacher leadership, teaming, and collegial inquiry) and their presence in Wake County, despite local challenges and deficits (Drago-Severson, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016, Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2009). Then, I offer an overview of teacher-leadership before defining how I operationalize teacher-leadership for this study (Drago-Severson, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). Finally, as my first research question asked eight

teacher-leaders how they describe and understand flourishing, if they do at all, throughout their career, I use the last section to describe the important concept of flourishing, since this will contribute and expand the literature on teacher-leaders in Wake County. To do so, I integrate scholarship and research from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, religious studies, and education to explore the history and foundations of flourishing with components of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom.

Approach to the Literature

In this section, I explain how I performed my literature review and/or my process for crafting the framework for this qualitative in-depth interview study with eight teacher-leaders from Wake County, North Carolina. In alignment with Maxwell (2013), I believe a conceptual framework is a “tentative theory” (p. 49) of the ideas I planned to investigate and served to narrow and justify my research.

The four main sources for this conceptual framework include (a) experiential knowledge, (b) existing theory and research, (c) pilot study and exploratory research, and (d) thought experiments (Maxwell, 2013). Importantly, within the national context of public education, the Wake County Public School District in North Carolina was the geographic frame for this research, so my introductory sections combine scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles with popular media editorials to cover the spectrum of voices present in this geographic context. It is important to note that the lines of Wake County and the Wake County Public School District or School System are the same, so I use the terms interchangeably. Then, because multiple disciplines contain decades of rich literature, in the form of abstract writings and empirical evidence, I chose an integrative review process to synthesize and explain the dynamic and emerging topics of teacher turnover and endurance, teacher leadership, adaptive challenges and

supports, and flourishing (Torraco, 2016). Throughout this chapter, I weave in all four types of sources (i.e., experiential knowledge, existing theory and research, pilot studies, and thought experiments) to explain the key concepts of my study (Maxwell, 2013).

Overall, the process of conducting this literature review included culling readings from classes, keeping up-to-date with popular articles and opinion editorials, reviewing peer-reviewed journal articles, conducting thousands of Google scholar and library searches, and investigating the bibliographies of seminal and anchor texts (Luker, 2008). I used Zotero as an online data bank and citation source to organize all relevant documents and 1½ years of written drafts in Microsoft Word to capture the analytical evolution of my thinking about the literature. Also, through referencing both Luker's (2008) expertise and Torraco's (2005, 2016) guidance on reviewing "mature topics" with a "holistic conceptualization and synthesis of the literature" (p. 7), I developed an intentional process to search and read various texts. For example, since I hope to use the concept of flourishing to conceptualize or "re-story" the teaching profession in North Carolina, I thematically structured and synthesized research on purpose, passion, and practical wisdom that could apply to a K-12 public school setting (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 202; also see 2016). As noted, a hope and significant outcome of this research was to re-story and generate a positive, strengths-based narrative of teaching relative to flourishing through in-depth qualitative interviews with eight teacher-leaders as the primary source of data collection.

As previously discussed in Chapter I, I re-introduce below a visual representation of the conceptual framework that I constructed based on the integrated literature review. Figure 2 displays how the national context of teacher turnover and endurance frames the experience of the teacher-leaders in Wake County, NC who were the focus of this study. On the right side, the teacher-leaders are at the apex, figuratively in this visual and literally in their work. Importantly,

they are held up by the supports and challenges provided by the Pillar Practices of mentorship, tapping for leadership inquiry, and teaming, which are possibly offered by two teacher-specific programs, the National Board Certification process (NBCT) and the North Carolina Teaching Fellows (NCTF). The arrows between the teacher-leaders on the left and the concept of flourishing on the right show the unknown space and understanding of how, if at all, flourishing is implied in the career of a teacher-leader. Based on the integrative literature review, I show on the right how flourishing, or the good life, mobilizes passion, purpose, and practical wisdom. Following this figure is an explanation of the national context of teacher turnover and teacher endurance.

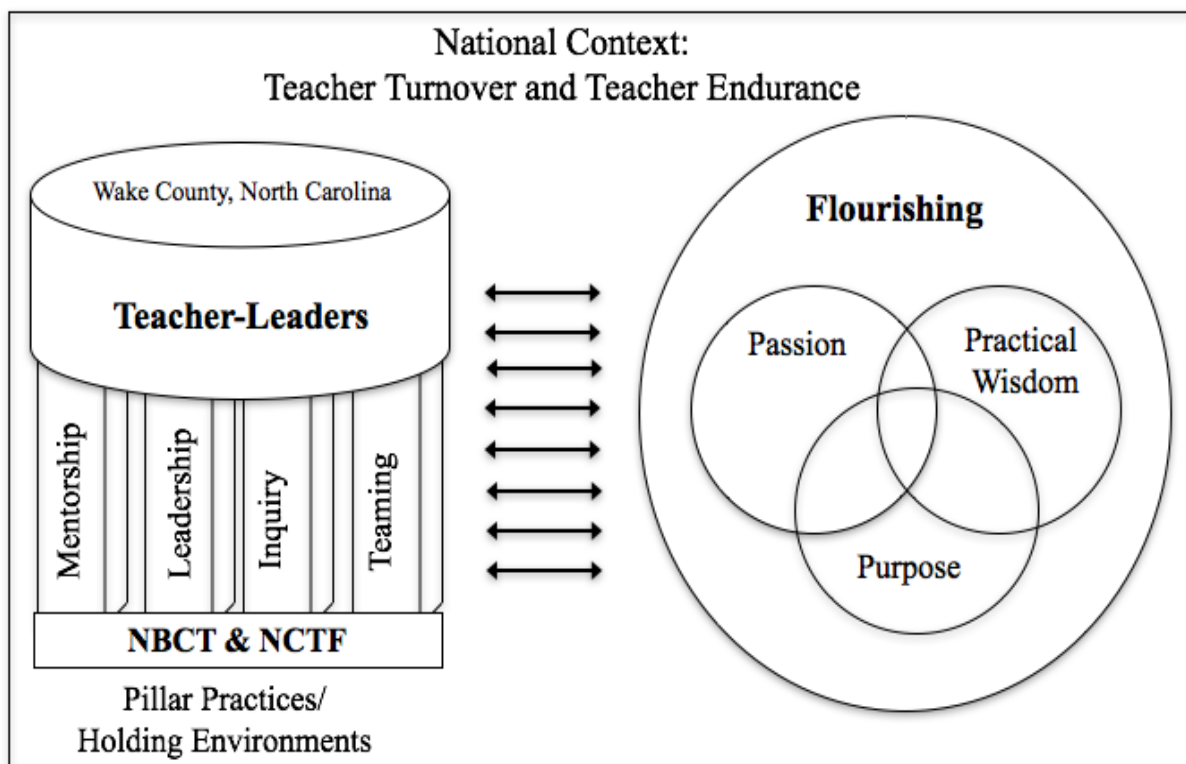


Figure 2. Conceptual framework (revisited)

National Context: Teacher Turnover and Teacher Endurance

In this section, I first describe the status of teacher turnover and teacher endurance in the United States. Although briefly summarized in Chapter I, I now offer more detail on the national data and public discourse on teacher attrition that surround the eight teacher-leader participants in this study.

As an overview, I explain the national context using two frames. The first frame describes the public discourse of teacher turnover as the deficit narrative surrounding schools that focuses on what teachers lack and why teachers leave. In the second frame, I examine the parallel discourse of teacher retention that prizes teacher endurance. In later sections, I zoom into the local context of Wake County, North Carolina, and offer similarities and differences for the local versus the national context.

Mismanaged Flight From the Classroom

As my focus was to understand the concept of flourishing for teacher-leaders who have stayed in the classroom at least 10 years, I first explored the national context of teacher turnover, which is growing more ubiquitous, even in North Carolina where it has tripled since 2010 (NCDPI, 2015). Therefore, it is a crucial initial step to understand the nationwide issue of teacher turnover as studies have shown that more than 42% of teachers leave within the first 5 years of teaching and up to 60% leave in the first 5 years in high-poverty areas (Perda, 2013). A recent publication from the Learning Policy Institute (Sucher et al., 2016) titled “A Coming Crisis in Teacher Education” examined the literature and popular articles to discover that there are “240,000 less teachers in 2014 than in 2009,” and in just the 5 months between June and November of 2015, over 300 articles in papers cited teacher shortages, compared to only 21 a few years before (p. 8).

Teachers are among those writing the articles, too. For example, Scott Ervin, a 15-year veteran teacher and well-known expert on how to work with and teach students labeled at-risk due to lower achievement scores, explained in the *Washington Post* how Ohio's education policies had made his difficult job impossible. Explaining how he loves the students, the tasks, and the challenges inherent in the work, he then stated, "Unfortunately, the 'help' provided by policy-makers in our state's capital is killing us" (Strauss, 2015a, n.p.). To elucidate, he described several of the data management systems, increased testing, and contrived collaboration meetings that policies have mandated with the goal of student success but with an outcome of teacher attrition. Mr. Ervin is not the only teacher who is leaving the classroom because of the sheer impossibility of the work, but he illustrated how several state and national policies are not only "killing" the teachers, but also hurting the students that the policies claim help (Strauss, 2015a, n.p.). Clarifying this dilemma, education scholar and political critic Diane Ravitch (2016) assessed the reforms as a "command-and-control" (p. 5) method that utilizes corporate-style reforms and characterizes any dissent as a teacher's "betrayal of student needs" (p. 5). Facing such a conundrum, it is no wonder teachers feel the need to defend their decision to leave the classroom.

Interestingly, the emphasis on evaluations and accountability has not only exacerbated the rising teacher turnover, but also impacted the dwindling teacher pipeline. A recent analysis shows that our nation has had the lowest number of students entering school to be teachers than ever in the last 45 years (Flannery, 2016). Plus, because of the need for a larger teacher force, "numerically there are far more beginner teachers than before," so the actual number of teachers who quit after their first year has also "soared" (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014, p. 25). In response, the impact of such high turnover has been detrimental to the system and the students.

For example, the expense of over half a million teachers leaving every year amounts to over \$2.2 billion annually for the United States (Alliance for Education, 2014). Worse, the constant turnover negatively impacts student achievement and disrupts the continuity of their schooling (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). In other words, teacher turnover has costly effects for districts and for children (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007), especially those in low-income areas (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Although some attrition is normal, according to a meta-analysis of research in 2008, it is not always healthy, is often attributed to poor working conditions and changes in career paths, and can be addressed through policy (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Policy conversations about turnover often lead to the next conversation about teacher retention.

Misguided Fight for Teacher Endurance

With turnover as an obvious problem, school systems and school leaders across the nation are working hard to retain the teachers they have (Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015; Urick, 2016). For this study, I interviewed teacher-leaders whom the system retained because I sought to understand how, if at all, they flourished throughout their career. By focusing on three distinctive and challenging points in the career trajectory (e.g., during the first 3 years, while earning National Board Certification, and within the last academic year [2016-2017]), I asked teachers about both their struggles and their successes during this time. Importantly, however, the concept of flourishing that emphasizes experiences of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom diverges from the current public discourse about veteran teachers, which I called here the misguided fight for teacher endurance.

In addition to the term *retention*, I used the term *endure* because the definition of endurance is to “remain firm under suffering without yielding” (Merriam-Webster, 2016, n.p.). Here, I first explain the negativity within the narrative of *retention* because I interviewed

teacher-leaders who have already defied the odds to stay in the classroom, and I explored with them how, if at all, they may have also resisted the perceived status quo of enduring, or merely surviving, to flourish in their work. Next, I describe the deficit narratives that circulate public discourse on the mediocrity of the teaching profession and the perceived negligent retention. Finally, I explain research that describes *smart retention* (Jacob, Vidyarthi, & Carroll, 2012) as a possible solution to help teachers stay and grow into leaders.

I discovered that public opinion believes the fight for teacher retention is misguided (Edelman, 2016; Morrison, 2014; Strauss, 2015b; Wilson, 2013). For example, tenure, one of the tools for teacher retention, evokes a popular mental model of the “rubber room,” a place in the New York Department of Education where teachers, whom system leaders cannot fire, just sit (Edelman, 2016, n.p.). This negative public discourse attached to tenure also conjures images of older teachers who have lost touch with the passion and vigor that young teachers could bring, yet are too hard to fire due to tenure and protection from their unions (Strauss, 2015b; Wilson, 2013). These narratives add to the denigration of the profession, which in and of itself also adds to teacher disillusionment and endurance (Morrison, 2014).

Additionally, evidence shows that only 20% of teachers are highly effective and teachers tend to have mediocre academic backgrounds based on statistics that show they have lower SAT scores than adults who have similar majors but do not go into education (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Jacob et al., 2012). These statistics perpetuate the belief that retained teachers are average or low-performing. Exploring the methods of retention with these perceptions and facts in mind, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) determined that there are *irreplaceable* teachers who are growth-oriented in their leadership, require feedback and recognition, and desire increased responsibility; therefore, administrators should intentionally try to keep these teachers through

purposeful *smart retention* (Jacob et al., 2012). In other words, TNTP argued that the typical efforts to keep all teachers does in fact encourage negligent retention of mediocrity. Therefore, the current public discourse and education research around retention show the desire to keep the best teachers and yet, somehow, lose the teachers who perpetuate the myth of mediocrity.

In response to TNTP's call for *smart retention* and the inherent problems in the teacher turnover and teacher retention narratives, I invited teacher-leaders who fit the criteria of *irreplaceables* to learn what supports and challenges help and/or hinder their own flourishing throughout their career of 10 to more than 20 years of teaching, if they do at all. However, contrary to these circulated myths, studies have shown that student achievement grows when teachers have significantly more experience, especially in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) courses (Henry, Fortner, & Bastian, 2012; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008; Kini & Podolsky, 2016). This is important because research has also shown that having teachers who are leaders, such as National Board Certified teachers, positively impacts student achievement and other teachers by providing mentoring and assuming leadership positions (Belson & Husted, 2015). It is also important because I wondered if these teacher-leaders, who improve student achievement, flourish at all or if, instead, they have fallen to the deficit thinking pervasive in the public discourse since *A Nation at Risk* deemed our schools and teachers to be failing (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

In conclusion, as teacher turnover rises, the stories of teachers enduring in complex and difficult contexts have become a nationwide expectation. Still, some teachers defy the odds and stay beyond 5 years to lead their classrooms; these "lead teachers" (Barth, 1987, p. 2), who have a more integral role in their schools, are the now known as *teacher-leaders* and are the focus of this study (Drago-Severson, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Lieberman & Miller, 2005).

Therefore, I next explain the definition of teacher-leadership. Moving from a national context, I zoom to the state and local level to describe how North Carolina (specifically Wake County) has made immense strides over the last decade to listen to teachers and act on creating better professional contexts, or *holding environments*, to support teachers who strive to be irreplaceable—not just mediocre. I continue to explain the local context of this study by describing the *where* (Wake County) and the *who* (teacher-leader participants) of my study, both of which have helped me explore how, if at all, teacher-leaders flourish in their careers.

Local Context: Holding Environments and North Carolina

In addition to the national context of increasing teacher turnover, the local context of Wake County, North Carolina, was crucial because the participants were eight teacher-leaders who teach there. As an overview, I first illustrate *where* (the Wake County Public School District in North Carolina) by describing the “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) within this local context that encourage the sustainability of teacher leadership and seem to align with Drago-Severson’s (2004, 2009, 2012, 2016) research-based Pillar Practices. I also chose to explore specific data points in a teacher’s career trajectory with the eight participants because they are important for turnover. These different points in time were the first 3 years, in the process of earning National Board Certification (<4 years), and within the last academic year. Finally, I explain how, despite these intentional efforts, Wake County teachers also face *adaptive challenges* that are ambiguous, have no clear answer or solution, and usually require changes in norms and culture (Heifetz, 1994). Because of the onslaught of changes facing schools, the act and role of leadership have become an adaptive challenge—for teachers and educators across the system (Drago-Severson, 2016). Thus, first is the definition of holding environments (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115;

Winnicott, 1965) and how they exist in North Carolina. Because the Wake County Public School System, where all the participants teach, and the Wake County district itself are the same, I use these terms interchangeably.

Local Context: Possible Holding Environments

Here, I clarify the concept of a *holding environment*. It is important to note that I selected the participating teachers from this local context because of what I see as their exposure to growth-oriented programs or *holding environments* and their intentional, personal desire to take advantage of them to be teacher leaders. Before I explain the *where* of this study, I define and describe *holding environments* from the adult developmental lens of constructive-developmental theory (Drago-Severson, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016, Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2009).

Holding environments. A “holding environment” is a developmentally optimal space—that is, a place where adults can grow and feel “honored for who they are” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). Drago-Severson (2012) explains these environments help make people feel safe so they can take risks and stretch their internal capacities, or their cognitive, affective, intrapersonal, and interpersonal meaning-making systems. The Pillar Practices of teaming, mentorship, collegial inquiry, and tapping for leadership are four types of relationships that provide holding environments in which adults can feel well held and meet their developmental capacities or “growing edge” (Drago-Severson, 2004, p. 88). According to Drago-Severson (2009), a *holding environment* “can consist of a relationship with one other person, a series of relationships, situations that engage the pillar practices, or a complex organization like a school” (p. 57). It can also be a combination of these as long as the goal is to create an environment that offers a “healthy balance of high support and high challenge” and meets adults where they are (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 58). Importantly,

Drago-Severson's research (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016) informed how the Pillar Practices of mentoring, teaming, offering adults leadership roles, and collegial inquiry provide the supports and challenges for different ways of knowing. Understanding the constructive-developmental theory and ways of knowing will clarify how the Pillar Practices are holding environments for growing leaders. After this, I describe how these may exist within the context of Wake County. Finally, I describe the *adaptive challenges* and budget deficits in North Carolina that these teacher-leaders may have faced that could have helped or hindered how they flourish, if they do at all.

Constructive-developmental theory. The concepts that create the foundation for the Pillar Practices derive from constructive-developmental theory, originally explored by psychologist Robert Kegan (1982, 1994) and expanded by Drago-Severson to help describe how adults make meaning in qualitatively different ways. Drago-Severson (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016) explained this as *ways of knowing* (i.e., instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transformational). Constructive-developmental theory maintains three key premises about how adults make-meaning: constructivism, developmentalism, and subject-object balance (Drago-Severson, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2013, 2016, Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2009). To explain the terms, Drago-Severson (2009) noted that *constructivism* means that we “actively construct” reality. *Developmentalism* means our way of constructing reality can change or evolve throughout a lifetime if we are offered developmentally appropriate supports and challenges. Moreover, the *subject-object balance* is the psychological understanding of how we as humans take perspective and can see or “hold as object” some things while others are embedded in our realities; therefore, we are “subject to” and cannot see (p. 37).

While the framework of constructive-developmental theory has some limitations in addition to strengths, it is an important backdrop to this study because it emphasizes *how* adults make meaning or sense of experiences rather than only focusing on the *what* or the subject of meaning making. Therefore, because I am asking these eight teacher-leaders how they describe and understand flourishing, this 40-year old understanding will help me understand the diversity of ways adults think, feel, and understand their experiences of flourishing, if they have any at all. While I did not assess these teacher-leaders' ways of knowing because it was beyond the scope and focus of my study, understanding that adults have different ways of making sense of their experiences is important, especially because they may need different forms of support and challenge to thrive.

Ways of knowing. Through the lens of constructive-developmental theory, Drago-Severson (2004, 2009) extended Kegan's (1982, 1994) earlier work to identify three primary ways of knowing or developmental levels or "windows through which a person sees the world and actively interprets life" (Drago-Severson, 2013, p. 58). These ways of making meaning fall beyond typical demographic categories such as gender, age, and life phase, and offer a different perspective of how scholars can illuminate "consistent" and "coherent system[s] of logic" that adults have (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 39). Research has shown that people make meaning in fundamentally different ways, or *ways of knowing*, and that appropriate supports and challenges are needed to facilitate increases in a person's *internal capacities* (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). Growth, according to this theory, involves increases in a person's internal capacities along four lines of development. A world-renowned scholar in adult leadership and adult development, Dr. Eleanor Drago-Severson discerned from her research that three main adult stages of meaning making are

most prevalent in adulthood. She (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016) called these the instrumental, social, and self-authoring ways of knowing. To be specific, the primary ways adults make meaning are instrumental, a rule-based self; socializing, an other-focused self; self-authoring, a reflective self; and self-transforming, an interconnecting self (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016). These ways-of-knowing are described briefly in Chapter I and in Appendix H: Ways of Knowing, adapted from Drago-Severson's (2004) *Helping Teachers Learn: Principal Leadership for Adult Growth and Development*. According to research, increases in interpersonal, intrapersonal, cognitive, and affective meaning-making systems help individuals manage varying complexities (Drago-Severson, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2000). For this study, I had limited time and resources, so I did not conduct Subject-Object interviews (Lahey et al., 2011) to determine each participant's way of knowing. While it would have been meaningful and beneficial to this field, each participant's *way of knowing* falls outside of the scope and intentions of my study. However, further work to identify how adults with different ways of knowing describe and understand flourishing differently would be a strong contribution to and next step in my research.

I now offer an explanation of *holding environments*. Instances of these are known as the Pillar Practices. First, my overview describes what the Pillar Practices are and how they work to serve as holding environments for growth (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). Next, I explain versions of these Pillar Practices embedded in the site of my dissertation research, Wake County, North Carolina

Local Context: Pillar Practices in Action in North Carolina

My dissertation focused on how teacher-leaders, who I consider to be growth-oriented in the leadership, might flourish. As these teachers have grown as leaders in their careers, their

local context provided opportunities that have attributes similar to the Pillar Practices. First, I explain these Pillar Practices, then I describe them in action in North Carolina.

Pillar Practices. The Pillar Practices are mentoring, providing leadership, teaming, and collegial inquiry, and they are “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965). Table 3 summarizes the different Pillar Practices, as explained in Drago-Severson’s (2009) *Leading Adult Learning: Supporting Adult Development in Our Schools*. These Pillar Practices are important to this study because they are possible structures and relationships that might have encouraged these eight teacher-leaders not only in their growth, but also possibly in their own flourishing throughout their careers.

Table 3

Pillar Practices

Mentoring	Providing Leadership	Teaming	Collegial Inquiry
A private relationship or community of reciprocal support.	Intentionally inviting adults to formal and informal roles to function as leaders	A context for individual and group reflection, to build capacity, and to exchange ideas	A context for meaningful dialogue about practice.

Adapted from Drago-Severson (2009) *Leading Adult Learning: Supporting Adult Development in our Schools*.

As suggested by Table 3, these Pillar Practices are open-ended and provide for multiple opportunities for variation to create holding environments for adults with different ways of knowing. Using more detailed examples of how these Pillar Practices exist in Wake County for the eight teacher-leaders, I show how North Carolina has worked hard to provide opportunities to help teacher-leaders.

The following possible opportunities in North Carolina align with Drago-Severson’s (2009) Pillar Practices. Because the pillar practices are known to be developmentally

intentional—that is, they serve as *holding environments* (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) for adult growth—I believe they may also be possible encouragers for teacher-leaders to flourish. For this reason, I wondered if adults who participated in NCTF and NBCT, which incorporated Drago-Severson’s Pillar Practices, might also flourish, and if so, how they would describe and understand their own flourishing and the encouragers and obstacles around their flourishing, if they did at all.

Pillar Practices in action. As noted, North Carolina has attempted to support the development of teacher-leaders by using structures and relationships that align with the *holding environments* known as the Pillar Practices. I will show how North Carolina has facilitated partnerships with multiple organizations and nonprofits to invest time and money into the development of teacher-leaders primarily through the creation of North Carolina Teaching Fellows, the Beginning Teacher Mentorship program, and Wake County’s support staff for National Board Certification. The Pillar Practices offer supports and challenges that help adults with different ways of knowing grow. Research has shown that the creation of these intentional holding environments offers a diverse array of supports and challenges that meet adults where they are (Drago-Severson, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016). This section explicitly describes how different programs in North Carolina and Wake County Public School System have cultivated potential versions of holding environments by using key aspects of the Pillar Practices of teaming, mentorship, tapping for leadership, and collegial inquiry. Because the teacher-leaders participated in these programs that incorporated pillar practices, they are important for understanding the first research question about how the teacher-leaders flourish, as well as the second and third research questions about how they describe and understand the encouragers of and obstacles to their own flourishing.

Teaming. The advent of the NCTF provided opportunities for future teachers to grow together professionally in cohorts throughout the 4 years of college, also known as teaming which is one of the four Pillar Practices (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009). While North Carolina faced a threat of a teaching shortage in 1986, specifically the Executive Director of the Public Forum, Jo Ann Norris, also noticed a decline in minority teachers entering the profession and found it negligent that students could go through school and “never have a teacher who looked like him or her” (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2013, p. 2). Modeled after UNC-Chapel Hill’s Morehead-Cain Scholar program, NCTF recruited high-performing students, paid for 4 years of university education, and immersed them in opportunities to grow individually and collectively with a cohort of peers. Throughout each cohort’s development, they were offered multiple enrichment activities to develop a deeper understanding of diversity and of who they were; they were purposefully exposed to more questions than answers and each university provided safe spaces for students to reflect on the different ways schools were addressing the adaptive challenges they faced. The cohorts were teams as they met often in classrooms and intentionally provided opportunities for “perspective broadening, taking risks, engaging in reflective practices,” and the like (Drago-Severson, 2009 p. 76). These cohorts within schools also formed new teams across the different college campuses in summer excursions like the Discovery Bus tour, a week-long tour of schools across the state (see Table 4 later in this chapter). This excursion, and others like Outward Bound, provided meaningful time and space for reflection after the students met varied challenges. Unlike most teacher turnover statistics, over 70% of Teaching Fellows stayed in teaching beyond their 4 years of service, required as repayment for the investment, with even 64% staying for 6 years (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2013).

Leadership roles. One of the Pillar Practices also offers adults different kinds of leadership roles since these provide opportunities to stretch multiple developmental capacities, such as being able to hold and negotiate multiple perspectives at one time (Drago-Severson, 2009). NC Teaching Fellows are taught from the beginning to be teacher-leaders, and research since has shown that NCTFs are among the best and brightest teacher-leaders in North Carolina (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). For example, the NCTFs are given opportunities throughout their experiences to be leaders of students through tutoring, and to be leaders of each other in different excursions and within class projects. This developmental intentionality provides opportunities for aspiring teachers to “experience the complexities of leadership and become more aware of our [their] and other people’s assumptions values and perspectives” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 122). This is also a key aspect of that National Board process where teachers must reflect actively on how their leadership and personal accomplishments influence student achievement.

Mentoring. In addition, the Pillar Practice of mentoring requires time and energy, and this school system carved out specific time for new teachers every month to ensure a purposeful and professional context for reflective practice and development (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2009, 2012, 2016). For participants who started teaching in Wake County within the last 10 years, Wake County provided a Beginning Teacher (BT) Mentoring program which paired each new teacher with a veteran who had previously gone through county-led mentoring training (Wake County Public School System, 2016). This BT structure also encourages teachers to become mentors after their fifth year of teaching. Mentoring is often a developmentally intentional practice because it requires relationships to provide a holding environment, and often, but not always, these mentorships are “private, reciprocal one[s] that are oriented to support growth” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 220). For these reasons, I asked my participants to reflect on their first

3 years to describe and understand their own flourishing to see which encouragers or obstacles existed during or before this time may have helped and/or hindered how, if at all, they flourished (my second and third research questions).

Collegial inquiry. Collegial inquiry is an intentional practice for building leadership through the art of dialogue and collective reflective practice (Drago-Severson, 2009). Aligning practices to several of the key aspects of collegial inquiry, Wake County promotes mentorship and collegial inquiry groups—two Pillar Practices—as teachers begin the process of becoming a National Board Certified teacher (Drago-Severson, 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016). To earn National Board Certification requires a multilayered professional development process and achievement for teachers, offered by the National Board for the Professionalization of Teachers (nbpts.org, 2014). It includes self-taped videos, reflections, standardized tests, proof of student growth, and so on, and is judged by other master teachers (nbpts.org, 2014). Research in North Carolina and other states has shown that teachers who have earned this certification have significant positive effects on student achievement, specifically in math and reading, more so than their non-nationally certified peers (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007). Collegial inquiry is an integral part of the National Board Process itself because the process encourages intentional discussion and reflection with other teachers during that process. For example, teacher-leaders engage in this process, namely they are invited to “[reflect] on one’s assumptions, beliefs, values, commitments, and convictions as part of the learning, teaching and leadership process” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 154) with a mentor or a group of peers by Wake County’s NBPTS Coordinator, CarolAnne Wade. This process not only directly reflects the Teacher Leadership Standards and Competencies (Teacher Leader Model Standards, 2015; Teacher Leadership Initiative, 2015), but it also helps identify effective teacher-leaders

through the earning of the certification. Considering this, I asked my participants how, if at all, this period provided supports and challenges that helped or hindered their ability to flourish.

In sum, I believe these opportunities in North Carolina align with Drago-Severson's (2013) Pillar Practices for teachers who have gone through the NCTF program, Beginning Teachers Program, and National Board Certification, by offering potential holding environments throughout their development as preservice, beginning, and experienced teachers that cultivate teacher-leaders. Because of these opportunities, Wake County was a fruitful context and environment to invite participants or teacher-leaders who might flourish throughout their careers. The first data point is their first 3 years; the second data point is during the National Board Certification process, which tends to take 1 year after completing 3 years of teaching. I also selected a third data point, times within the last year, because Wake County has not been impervious to the deficit narratives and many recent abuses facing public education nationwide.

As a review of this information, Table 4 presents adapted descriptions from Drago-Severson's (2009, pp. 61-63) article about the Pillar Practices. I added ways they might align with North Carolina and Wake County's efforts, specifically the BT and NBCT processes. As the table shows, the practices of the NCTF and Wake County create structures and relationships that they intend to support adults, specifically teachers, to develop as professionals. Based on these descriptions, many of the practices, though perhaps not all, align with Drago-Severson's (2009) Pillar Practices and are developmentally intentional in how they create holding environments for teachers to grow.

In the next section I provide more detail about the context of North Carolina and the political arc of change over the last several decades to offer more context for the adaptive challenges these teachers face.

Table 4

Pillar Practices in Action

Pillar Practice	Description	North Carolina Teaching Fellows	Wake County (BT and NBCT)
Teaming	“Teaming opens communication, decreases isolation, enables adults to share leadership and to overcome resistance to change, and enhances implementation of changes” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 61). They also attend to developmental diversity by offering opportunities for “perspective broadening, taking risks, engaging in reflective practices,” and so on (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 76).	The Discovery Bus Tour mixes all 400 students from all 17 colleges and university in the states into different bus teams. This team traverses the state together and while in each other’s hometowns, they question their own and other people’s assumptions about the role of schools and teachers in the communities collaboratively.	Teaming for Beginning Teachers rarely occurs unless through casual social circumstances and it is also an area of weakness for NBCT, although the Center for Quality Teachers have tried to create teams through their Collaboratory (an online collaboration system) by not only discussing ideas but arranging for action to solve problems.
Providing Leadership Roles	“...this practice as inviting teachers to share authority and ideas as teachers, curriculum developers, or administrators worked toward building community, sharing leadership, and promoting change. Working with others in a leadership role helps adults uncover their assumptions and test out new ways of working as professionals” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 61) This gives adults a chance to experience complexities of leadership and become more aware of our own and other people’s assumptions values and perspectives” (p. 122).	From Discovery Bus Tour Leaders to tutors of elementary students, this program repeatedly explained the trainings advanced their knowledge and expertise to be leaders of other teachers. This included week-long field trips to New York or other parts of the state to provide service leadership and responsibility for setting up an orientation with a district of each student’s choosing to learn about their policies (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012).	One of the NBCT entries requires reflection on professional leadership of other adults, initiatives, and pedagogy. Reports have shown that after going through the process of becoming an NBCT, the majority of teachers felt more agency and leadership in their schools and were eager to share their knowledge with other teachers (Petty et al., 2016)
Mentorship	“Mentoring or coaching creates an opportunity for broadening perspectives, examining assumptions, and sharing expertise and leadership and can be a more private way to support adult development” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 63). They are also intentionally “oriented to support growth” (p. 220).	Teaching Fellows who had graduated were always invited back to the seminars and weekends to lead sessions or provide guidance to preservice fellows. Meaningful mentorship, however, was rarely provided in a consistent fashion.	The Beginning Teacher (BT) program is a mentorship program at its foundation and asks each school to intentionally pair a veteran teacher who has been trained to be a mentor with a first-year teacher and for them to meet weekly to discuss ways to improve or support his/her needs.

Table 4 (continued)

Pillar Practice	Description	North Carolina Teaching Fellows	Wake County (BT and NBCT)
Collegial Inquiry	“Collegial inquiry is shared dialogue with the purpose of helping people becoming more aware of their assumptions, beliefs, and convictions about their work and those of colleagues” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 62). In collegial inquiry groups, “developmental intentionality requires clear guidelines for how to communicate and time to explore multiple perspectives within a safe environment” (p. 164).	Every semester, seminars and classes offered “practice to engage adults in conflict resolution, goal setting, decision making, and learning about key educational issues, such as diversity” (p. 62)	The Beginning Teacher (BT) model creates monthly meetings for all new teachers and their mentors to reflect on their practice and set goals for themselves relative to classroom management or higher-level questioning

Adapted information from Drago-Severson (2009), pp. 61-63

Local Context: Challenges and Change in North Carolina

In this section, I define and describe explicit adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994) that Wake County, North Carolina’s teacher-leaders may have faced over the last 10 years in addition to the active rescinding of supports from the legislature enacted through the NCDPI and the Wake County Public School System. First, I define *adaptive challenges*, then give examples of challenges that could have encouraged or discouraged the eight teacher-leaders in flourishing throughout their careers, specifically in their beginning years, while earning their boards and most recently. My hope is to define adaptive challenges with examples before describing the political-contextual background all eight participants experienced growing up in public schools.

Adaptive challenges. In the complexity of teacher-leadership, *adaptive challenges* are “situations or problems for which neither a problem nor a solution is known or has been identified,” such that the problem and solution are understood throughout the process (Drago-

Severson, 2009, p. 6). According to Drago-Severson (2009) and Kraft et al. (2015), Simon and Moore Johnson (2015), and Xia, Izumi, and Gao (2015), many teachers leave the profession because they are seeking more supportive environments and relationships in the midst of addressing adaptive challenges. Unlike technical challenges which teachers also face, like learning a new system for teaching vocabulary or adopting a new curriculum that are problems with clear solutions (Drago-Severson, 2009), *adaptive challenges*, according to psychiatrist and leadership scholar Ronald Heifetz (1994), are challenges with no clear answer or solution. These kinds of challenges are increasing for teacher-leaders and for all in education today (Drago-Severson, 2016). They are challenges that require the internal capacities to manage enormous complexity and ambiguity. Therefore, I paid close attention to understanding the specific *adaptive challenges* that these eight teacher-leaders in Wake County, NC may have faced. The next section describes the *where* of my study or context and possible changes that may have also been adaptive challenges. The *where* is then followed by a description of the *who*. As well, I explain the context of North Carolina and the Wake County Public School District, where the participants teach. Importantly, the timeline of political changes illuminates the chronological context the teachers experienced.

The arc of change in North Carolina. To describe the context of North Carolina, I review the arc of change the state has experienced specifically related to education, starting with the 1980s. At this time, the participants were either beginning their own public school experience as elementary school through high school students ($n = 4$) or in one of North Carolina's public universities and in preparation for teaching ($n = 4$). In fact, four of the participants, who taught for almost 25 years, have been in public school settings since the 1980s and witnessed the duration of these changes. Also, each of the participants not only teaches in North Carolina but

also grew up in the state, which is another reason why I start with the 1980s. Before I discuss the general political timeline, I first address the singular point of desegregation in the state and the district of Wake County on its own.

Wake County and desegregation. An important mark just before the 1980s was the merger of Wake County and Raleigh City schools in 1978, soon after schools finally started desegregating due to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the following case of *Swann v. the Charlotte Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971). From 1962 to 1982, the downtown Raleigh area, where the Raleigh public schools were predominately populated by minority students, experienced multiple school closures due to a decrease in overall population (Chen, 2017). This movement of affluent, typically White, communities moving out to the suburbs is known as *White flight*, and districts all over the nation were experiencing similar predicaments due to racially inequitable residential laws and red tape (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2005). As a result of this population flux in the suburbs, the schools in the Wake County district were overcrowded. To manage these changes, the business community and the School Board agreed to create innovative Magnet Schools, schools with specialized and increased resources, in the city and merged the two districts into one. According to *The Public School Review*, Wake County tried multiple methods in tandem with these efforts, including busing first based on race, then socioeconomic status, to ensure equitable allocation of resources, yet the outpacing and exponential growth of poverty and overall population made this plan unsustainable long-term (Chen, 2017). In summary, the Wake Count Public School System has evidenced the push and pull of parents, School Board members, teachers, and students relative to how to manage the racial disparities within the district and the state. Due to this fortuitous merger, however, the county now boasts the highest supplement in the state. This supplement pay in 2015-16 in Wake

County starts with an additional 17.5% for beginning teachers and is based on the local taxes and income of the surrounding taxes (Ball, 2016). The reasons this district now boasts one of the highest salaries is not just because the standard of living, and therefore income of families in the district, is higher—though this may be true overall, but it is also due to a complex legislative history that most citizens do not even understand (Egan, 2016). For this reason, I offer a brief overview of North Carolina’s political history for a greater context to the importance it has given for decades to increasing the value of teachers.

North Carolina in the 1980s. Following Governor Terry Sanford’s Quality Education Program and interests (Drescher, 2012), Governor Jim Hunt was fundamentally involved in progressing teacher professionalism in the 1980s, most likely as a response to *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983). Nationally, public education was under a microscope, and during the 1980s, Governor Jim Hunt, who had been elected in 1977, pushed kindergarten, reading programs, and reading aids in every classroom (Christensen, 2010). Addressing this pressing need for more resources, Governor Hunt worked to raise teacher salaries—though he had to freeze them in 1982 in the midst of a national recession. Seeing this as a backwards step, he created the North Carolina Commission on Education and Economic Growth (CEEG) in 1983, which gave an action plan to the General Assembly to support future efforts to professionalize the teaching force (Fleer, 1994). Several parts of this action plan did not pass until his successor Governor Jim Martin; however, one of his achievements was the co-creation of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program. By collaborating with the Public School Forum and others, the legislature agreed to start a state-wide program called the North Carolina Teaching Fellows to recruit high school students to the profession of teaching, with special attention to underrepresented minorities like rural students and persons of color (Cohen, 2015). As a brief

reminder, this program recruited high school students who upheld high standards of academic achievement into teaching by paying for 4 years of university and offering supportive trainings and structures in addition to regular coursework. Each participant in this dissertation study applied to and was accepted to this specific program when they were 18 years old and almost all hail from rural towns from Wingate to New Bern ($n = 7$) as the program intended.

In addition to supporting teacher recruitment, Governor Hunt was a staunch advocate and the first chair of the Board of Directors for the National Board Certification for Professional Teachers, a nationwide accreditation for individual teachers to prove their teaching ability and capacity (nbpts.org). The creation of this professional development was in response to a report titled *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, which catalogued steps for increasing student achievement through professionalization of teachers (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1986). In his home state, Governor Hunt worked with legislature to make this a meaningful professional endeavor for teachers and provided funding for teachers in two ways. First, the state paid the full \$2,500 investment for teachers who wanted to earn their boards. Second, each teacher who earned their boards received a 12% pay raise. This raise would last 10 years until the teachers had a chance to renew, for which the teachers would pay themselves (approximately \$1,000 value) in order to keep the 12% raise for the next 10 years. Governor Hunt was able to move many of these policies and legislative actions through his Basic Education Plan (Fleer, 1994). Each of the eight participants took advantage of funding to go to college for free through NCTF and earn their National Board Certification within the first few years they were eligible (Year 4 or 5 of teaching). Interestingly, NCTFs were required to teach for a minimum of 4 years, so several of the teachers entered the process to earn their National Boards while they were still paying back their NCTF loans.

North Carolina in the 1990s-2000s. Throughout the 1990s and into the early 2000s, the teaching force grew substantially in North Carolina. In reflection, thanks to Governor Hunt's legislative power and an assortment of nonprofit and nonpartisan support, the initiatives and programs he began in the 1980s continued to be funded for decades. Due to the efforts of both Governor Martin and Hunt, public school teachers received continued support in their professional development, which drove North Carolina to the forefront of education, especially among its peer southern states (Batchelor, 2015). Interestingly, several of the levers they used in the 1990s and 2000s corresponded with the national push for accountability, but North Carolina was ahead of the curve. From starting Smart Start, as free Pre-K education in 1993, to the Excellent Schools Act in 1997, teachers received bonuses and incentives for both performance and continuing their education (Batchelor, 2015; Fleeer, 1994). Specifically, this act was:

a four-year plan to raise standards and pay for teachers that increased average teacher salaries from 43rd to 23rd in the nation, provided additional pay for teachers with advanced degrees and National Board Certification, provided incentive awards for teachers in schools performing at the highest levels on state assessments, created rigorous standards for teacher certification. (Guillory, 2005, p. 16)

In addition to implementing these economic boosters for teachers who were striving to improve for their students, the state was facing the challenges of desegregation, despite the strides in the 1960s by Governor Terry Sanford (Drescher, 2012). Progressive efforts for school integration were rivaled by national conversations about the Persian Gulf War, yet teachers were able to take advantage of the state's investment in public schools from the early 1990s through the early 2000s. Regarding Governor Hunt's perspective with education and civil rights, he stated:

Instead of just dividing up the pie differently, and fighting over the pie, we have to grow the pie. . . . That is probably one of the reasons that my approach was a little different from other progressive leaders. I didn't just want to fight by taking something from somebody and give to somebody else. I wanted to grow the whole pie. (Christensen, 2010, p. 239)

Public schools in North Carolina benefited greatly from his uniting the efforts within the state to “grow the pie,” not only for the economy but also for teachers in this study (Christensen, 2010, p. 239). As one participant said, these were the “golden years” of teaching in the state of North Carolina, where salaries were on par and professional development was one step ahead of the rest of the nation.

The Great Recession (2007-2008). The Great Recession hit North Carolina and Wake County Public School System relatively hard. Starting in 2008, the legislature froze the teacher raise pay scale that had previously offered a 1-2% increase in salaries every year to keep up with inflation and presumably support experience (Hui, 2017; Speaks, 2014). Massive cuts were made across the district in a *last hire, first fire* policy. Beyond these two distinct changes, the stalling of the economy led to the first republican Governor, Pat McCrory, and full Republican legislature in decades, a pattern witnessed across the nation. With their newly cemented power, the legislative body decided to disband funding of the NCTF and halt the \$2,500 grants to teachers so they could afford to apply for National Board Certification status (Batchelor, 2015). As of 2011, the Department of Education noted that 84% of teachers in North Carolina were White, while only 53% of students were White—thus evidencing my difficulty to find teacher-leaders of color (Boser, 2014). Despite these budget cuts, Wake County Public Schools has had the most National Board Certified Teachers in the nation for the last 9 years (starting in 2008) (Wake County Public School System, 2016). It also has over 500 teacher-leaders in this district who teach high school and actively participated in these two leadership programs (NCTF and National Board of Professional Teachers). The 2011 cut to the NCTF was also a blow to this singular program, which strove to increase the diversity of teachers to match the race/ethnicity of their students (Cohen, 2015; Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). Still, I chose the district of Wake

County for its density of possible participants who both met these criteria and have remained teachers in classrooms. It is also worth noting as context that many NCTFs went on to become principals and educational leaders in other capacities. For example, one is the current governor of Chapel Hill.

Wake County, North Carolina today (2018). For this study, I wondered about teacher-leaders who were able to participate in possible “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965), created by the state, such as the NCTF and National Board of Professional Teaching standards, so I chose the district with the highest supplement (Ball, 2016) and most NBCT teachers. To invite the specific eight participants for this study, I narrowed the pool to those who had been teaching for at least 10 years which I chose as the cut-off. I made this choice because of the Great Recession which began over 10 years ago (approximately 2007-2008). This economic shift sparked the mass exodus of teachers from North Carolina because of such changes as the pay freeze and other choices made to conserve funding such as supplemental resource disintegration funding for other sociopolitical nonprofits that had previously supported families of students with low socioeconomic status (Batchelor, 2015).

In the next section, I describe the *who* of my dissertation study, the teacher-leaders.

Teacher-Leadership

To explain the expansive and amorphous field of teacher-leadership, I give an overview of the evolution and multiple factors, traits, and roles that often distinguish teacher-leaders from other teachers. Subsequently, I explain some of the tensions and complexities in the proverbial hyphen between teaching and leading in teacher-leadership (Brenneman, 2015; Drago-Severson,

2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Lai & Cheung, 2015; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Finally, I focus on how I defined teacher-leaders for my study.

The Evolution of Teacher-Leadership

To explain why teacher-leaders were important for this study, I first describe the variety and layers of standards that scholars and policymakers have imposed on teacher-leaders over time. Next, I explain the evolution of the concept of teacher-leaders. Importantly, teacher-leadership has been characterized as developing in waves, thus illustrating the fluidity and complexity of the term in addition to its rising capacity to enforce school reform and school change (Lowery-Moore, Latimer, & Villate, 2016; Murphy, 2005; Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000). Finally, I use my pilot study and research to evidence some of the complexity of teaching and leading experiences. After I thoroughly explain teacher-leadership, I offer the specific definitions and understandings of teacher-leaders in this study.

Teacher-leader standards. In an effort to use decades of efforts to harness the term *teacher-leaders*, several scholars, practitioners, union representatives, and policymakers created the Teacher Leader Model Standards, as portrayed in Table 5 (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2012). They constructed domains, or standards, as a way of solidifying a vision of teacher-leadership and creating some traction in policymaking to help the profession move from a “flat” to a “dynamic” model, according to Dennis Van Rockel, the former president of the National Education Association (see teacherleaderstandards.org, 2016). Thus, setting the stage for teachers in the 21st century, they crafted seven domains from 2008 to 2012 that they believe define the scope and functions of teacher-leaders. Similarly, the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards as early as the 1980s created five core propositions for professionalizing teachers, which closely align with the mainstream definition offered decades later by teacher-

leader scholars York-Barr and Duke in the early 2000s. They updated their standards in 2016. As shown in Table 5, the standards range from domains, propositions, and actions, thus creating a complex range of expectations for teacher-leaders.

Table 5

Teacher-Leadership Standards

Teacher-Leader Model Standards (TLMS, 2012)	National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (npts.org, 2016) first published in 1989	“What do we know about Teacher Leadership?” (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 266)
Domain I: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Support Educator Development and Student Learning	Proposition 1: Teachers are committed to students and their learning.	(<i>What they do</i>) Coordination and management
Domain II: Accessing and Using Research to Improve Practice and Student Learning	Proposition 2: Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.	School or district curriculum work
Domain III: Promoting Professional Learning for Continuous Improvement	Proposition 3: Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.	Professional development of colleagues
Domain IV: Facilitating Improvements in Instruction and Student Learning	Proposition 4: Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.	Participation in school change/improvement
Domain V: Promoting the Use of Assessments and Data for School and District Improvement	Proposition 5: Teachers are members of learning communities.	Parent and community involvement
Domain VI: Improving Outreach and Collaboration with Families and Community		Contributions to the profession
Domain VII: Advocating for Student Learning and the Profession”		Preservice teacher education

As explained in Table 5, the concept *teacher-leadership* has taken on several iterations, such that even starting in the late 1980s, Roland Barth (1987) discussed how teachers “harbor extraordinary leadership capabilities” (p. 1). Often, the definition of teacher-leadership emerges from these capabilities. For example, Lieberman and Miller (2005) stated teacher-leaders are those who continue growing and “invent new possibilities for their students, themselves,” and

other adults in their school and community (p. 16). Meanwhile, Katzenmeyer and Moller (2001) found that they “lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others towards improved educational practice” (p. 5). Other definitions depend more on specific roles and links to administration like in several variations of distributed leadership models that indicate teacher-leaders take on tasks that were once the administration’s sole purpose (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Plus, many scholars have emphasized the collaborative conceptualization of teacher-leadership as working closely with principals and teacher teams rather than the role being limited to one person (Heck & Hallinger, 2009).

Teacher-leader waves. Within the last few decades, York-Barr and Duke’s (2004) meta-analysis described the variety and typology of teacher-leaders in empirical research and found that most teacher-leaders have proven to be excellent teachers in the classroom before they expanded their ability beyond the classroom to garner added leadership responsibilities. Their work follows Silva, Gimbert, and Nolan (2000) who examined how teacher-leadership has shifted through three different waves over time: The first wave was recognition as a department chair; to *remote control* leadership in the second wave, which named curriculum specialists and instructional coaches to aid other teachers as leaders (Darling-Hammond, Baratz-Snowden, & National Academy of Education, 2005); and a third wave that identified leadership as a process rather than a position with informal and formal roles of influence.

Most recently, Holland, Eckert, and Allen (2014) conducted a historical and theoretical examination to model the evolution of teacher-leadership within the landscape of education policy (p. 434). They introduce a fourth wave of leadership with identifiers like *mavens* and *innovators* who influence policy even from their classroom. This fourth wave explicitly shows

leadership as the connection to policy implementation rather than the strict managerial role Silva et al. (2000) pinpointed a decade earlier. In their model, an important observation is that all four waves exist parallel to each other beyond 2015. This is both a compliment and a criticism of teacher-leadership's complexity and shows how the term could expand to become too diffuse within and between the waves, thus making the classification even more nebulous.

In response, scholars are attempting to bound the term and, in so doing, have named context as crucially important to how teacher-leaders lead. Berry, Byrd, and Wieder (2013) offered that *teacherpreneurs* pursue opportunities to increase their capacity to be better teachers and are known as politically savvy teachers who *lead without leaving*, as the subtitle suggests (Holland, Eckert, & Allen, 2014; Lieberman & Miller, 2005). This fourth wave, almost by definition, eschews firm job descriptions or boundaries, but this can be troubling. For example, a study on Hybrid Teacher Leaders, a common name for those who act as fourth wave teacher-leaders and assist districts in school reform efforts, found that the roles are often too ill-defined and expected to emerge out of the needs in the school such that the teachers felt overworked and undercompensated (Margolis & Doring, 2013). In the next section, I explore the complexity of teaching and leading in 21st century public schools, as I learned from teacher-leaders about their experiences of flourishing in their careers, if they did at all, in a pilot study in which I explored the experiences of a few leaders.

Teacher-leader complexity. In this section, I explain the complexity of teaching and leading based on research and a pilot interview I conducted in 2015. To discover this complexity, I conducted a pilot study (C&T 5002) with two participants and myself as a former teacher-leader. Through this, I was able to explore how two teacher-leaders described and understood their experiences of teaching and leading in public high schools in the fall of 2015. Interestingly,

I found their responses resonated with the notion that leadership work can be invigorating, yet it can also lead to burnout, as suggested by the concept called the “Huberman Paradox” (Little & Bartlett, 2002, p. 362). The term derives from Huberman’s (1993) research, which found that teachers who stay and teach in the classroom often reflect and describe a more satisfying career than those who were stimulated by their work and in time engaged in political issues during their teaching career. As cited in Little and Bartlett (2002), Huberman stated in 1989:

Teachers who steer clear of reforms or other multiple-classroom innovations but who invested consistently in classroom-level experiments . . . were more likely to be satisfied later on in their career. . . . [H]eavy involvement in schoolwide innovation was a fairly strong predictor of disenchantment after 20-25 years of teaching. (pp. 50-51)

Huberman’s work suggested that the fourth wave of reform for teacher-leadership may not be the panacea to teacher turnover many scholars believe and might even have an adverse impact on teachers who take on more, perhaps too much, leadership beyond the classroom due to its lack of sustainability. Upon discovering the possible, though tenuous, connections between teacher-leaders’ experiences and possible negative outcomes, I realized I was more interested in not only positive experiences of teacher-leaders, but also the best possible experiences. Therefore, in this study, I sought to learn how, if at all, these eight teacher-leaders understood the adaptive challenges inherent in their work and how, if at all, they describe and understand the complexity of their careers through a lens of flourishing.

Echoing Huberman (1989) and the two teachers in my pilot study, other scholars have also discovered even the title of *teacher-leadership* can be counterproductive as teachers believe the differentiation can harm relationships, create a hierarchy in a collaborative group, or require an increasing amount of managerial work outside the classroom (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). As scholars are still trying to understand the best practices for teacher-leadership, my dissertation research adds the experiences of eight current teacher-leaders, specifically in high schools in

Wake County, NC, to learn how, if at all, these teachers who teach and lead describe and understand their own flourishing. Next, I describe the teacher-leaders who participated in this study in Wake County, NC.

Teacher-Leaders in North Carolina

Here, I explain how I narrowed the definition of teacher-leaders for this study. Specifically, the *who* for this study are teachers who are “galvanized by the desire to improve and thus ensure learning for all students” and “are driven to experiment, take risks, collaborate, seek feedback, and question their own and others’ practices” (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 64; Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012; Lieberman & Miller, 2005). In other words, I developed selection criteria for teacher-leaders in this study based on research that showed teachers are leaders who seek opportunities to grow. This section describes the literature and research that supports the selection criteria I listed briefly in Chapter I and describe further in Chapter III.

Although the literature offers multiple waves and descriptions of teacher-leadership over time (Holland et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2000), I narrowed down the teacher-leader participants for this study in two distinct ways. First, I only invited teachers who participated in what I see as “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965), specifically two programs that cultivate teacher-leaders: NCTF and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Second, I limited participants to teachers who had at least 10 years of experience and, therefore, are veterans who surpassed the 5-year threshold of turnover (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Torres, 2014). I did so to manage the scope of this in-depth interview study because these two programs (a) show the state’s intentional creation of “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) and (b) show opportunities over the last few decades to cultivate *irreplaceable* teacher-leaders (Jacob et

al., 2012) and (c) include teachers-leaders who are more effective teachers, as shown by high student achievement through high test scores and extensive involvement in leadership (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012; Belson, Belson, & Husted, 2015; Petty et al., 2016; Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2013).

In essence, these two programs also tend to produce teachers who are high quality or “highly qualified,” meaning teachers who have been trained and certified in the subject matter they teach, as defined by the *No Child Left Behind* (2002) act and as determined by research (Petty et al., 2016, p. 5). In the following subsections, I describe each program that helps cultivate teacher-leaders in North Carolina. I also explain the second criterion I used to define teacher-leaders and narrowed the potential pool of participants (teaching experience of at least 10 years).

North Carolina Teaching Fellows. The North Carolina Teaching Fellows program began in 1986. Because of a joint effort from the legislature and the nonprofit the Public School Forum of NC, the program was created to recruit the top 10% of high school students to public school teaching by offering them a full scholarship to a 4-year college in North Carolina. In return, they had 7 years to teach for 4 years at any school in the state. Research has shown that these teachers are among the best and brightest teacher-leaders in the state (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). Although the legislature decided to stop funding the program in 2011, many NC Teaching Fellows still teach in schools across the state as the last class to graduate in 2015 (Fitzsimon, 2015). This program, as already conveyed, offered opportunities that I believe align with the Pillar Practices or “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) that the teachers in this study most likely took advantage of in order to grow as leaders even before they entered the classroom.

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. In 1987, North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt, along with several other leaders in education, co-founded the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to improve and professionalize teaching across the nation. To do so, teachers who had taught for at least 3 years could apply to go through a rigorous certification process in which they submit videos, reflect on their practice, pass an exam, and show high performance on several writing assessments judged by their peers. In North Carolina, the state paid the \$2,500 fee to apply until 2011, yet the state still offers a 12% raise to the teachers who pass and become what is known as National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). Similar to the NCTF program, NBCTs are leaders in their schools, see a personal improvement in their practice, and outperform their non-NBCT peers in increasing student achievement (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; McKenzie, 2013; Petty et al., 2016). This program, as already conveyed, offered the Pillar Practices or “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) that the participants in this study most likely took advantage of in order to grow as leaders at mid-points in their careers when research has shown that most teachers actually leave (Conley & You, 2017; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

Veteran or career teachers. In addition to membership in these two programs and participation in these holding environments (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965), it is also important to note that teacher-leadership, for this study, applied to veteran teachers with equal to or more than 10 years of experience, even though teachers can hold leadership roles as early as their first year. Although teacher-leadership is not necessarily bound by time or years of experience, time was important for my study as I wanted to learn how teachers made sense of supports and challenges at different points in their career that helped or hindered their own flourishing—during beginning years (1-3 years), during the National Board

Certification process (>4 years), and within the last year. In other words, it was only for this study that I limited the experiences of teacher-leadership to the two programs NCTF and NBCT and the temporal boundary of equal to or more than 10 years of experience at the time of participation. Research has shown that increased years of experience not only increases student achievement, but also increases student success in other measures like attendance (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Torres, 2014). Moreover, if teachers have taught for at least 10 years, then they most likely experienced the Great Recession, a period of economic downturn in the nation and, specifically, North Carolina in 2008. As I explained in Chapter I, this timeframe is when the state and many teachers faced multiple adaptive challenges, or challenges without clear answers (Heifetz, 1994).

In summary, the teacher-leaders for this study epitomize North Carolina's paradoxical status of teacher-leadership in the midst of national turnover, which is why their insight into how, if at all, they flourish is important to disrupting the narratives of teacher attrition. The review of the literature for understanding the Pillar Practices and Wake County's context for teacher-leadership reflects a diligent search of popular media sources such as *Education Week* and the local *News and Observer* in addition to scholarly books and articles over the last decade found through searches of scholarly journals focusing on teacher-leadership and networks of researchers and colleagues who also studied the conditions and contexts of teacher-leaders. The overwhelming conclusion is that the teachers who have stayed in Wake County have experienced myriad reforms, changes, and shifts, and so I wondered if they have endured alone or, perhaps, found ways to flourish.

In the next section, I discuss the concept of flourishing in greater detail based on an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2016). I synthesized theory and empirical research from

philosophy, religious studies, positive psychology, and education leadership to show how the threads of passion and engagement, purpose and meaning, and practical wisdom help us understand the meaning of a flourishing experience.

Flourishing: Living Well and Doing Well for Self and Others

For this section of the conceptual framework for my qualitative dissertation research study with eight teacher-leaders in Wake County, North Carolina, I review the concept of flourishing because this study sought to learn from them how they describe and understand their own flourishing and the supports and challenges that helped and/or hindered those experiences.

I describe the following threads that the literature offers as integral to flourishing life: *passion*, the flow and engagement people sense in their work (Conway, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fredrickson, 2009; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003); *purpose*, the meaning people attribute to their lives and relationships (Bell, 2016; Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Haidt, 2006; Hansen, 1994; Higgins, 2011; Nouwen, 2014; Seligman, 2011); and practical wisdom or *phronēsis* (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095b), the prudence and sensitivity to context, combined with excellence in practice, that people cultivate over time (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Halverson, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Wallace, 1988). These strands are important because, in the first research question, I focused on the concept of flourishing and learned from teacher-leaders about how they understand their experiences of purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and practical wisdom, and how, if at all, these or other concepts informed their flourishing as they reflected on three different points in their career. I also asked about the factors that helped and/or hindered their flourishing. The next subsections explain the intersections of understanding flourishing as living well and doing well by integrating passion,

purpose, and practical wisdom. I begin with an overview of the historical origin of the concept of flourishing, which I had touched upon in Chapter I.

Historical Origins: The Soul Work of Flourishing

The historical origins of flourishing begin with the concept of *eudemonia* or living the “good life” (Higgins, 2011, p. 42). Rather than referencing today’s narrow concepts of a good life or success related to money and career achievements, Aristotle’s concept of these *eudemonia* was the beginning of virtue-ethics to answer the question “How ought one live to fulfill their ultimate function?” This question was not meant to elicit an immediate response, but instead, when philosophers of the time offered this question, it was an opportunity to stop and reflect on all of life’s choices and to inspire the soul to fulfill its ultimate function. In other words, Aristotle intended an “optimistic in outlook, connecting what is meaningful or valuable with what it is to flourish as a human being” and is crucial (Lavery, 2005, p. 194). The threads of purpose and meaning, passion and engagement, or practical wisdom are the threads that offer a contemporary concept of how religious scholars, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers have imagined one might live life to experience flourishing. In the following subsections, I explain these three strands in more detail.

Passion and Engagement

In this section, I explain the thread of passion and engagement as a concept of a flourishing experience. From personal experience, the feeling of getting lost in time accompanies the sense of complete engagement or when passion take center stage of a moment. The definition of passion from *Merriam-Webster* (2016, n.p.) is a “strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something”; therefore, it ties closely to the idea of a purpose, but it also means “emotions distinguished from reason” or “ardent affection.” In other words, though

tightly linked to purpose, the concept of passion includes the experience of flow and the complex nature of vital engagement in the work teachers do (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008; Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Conway, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman et al., 2005). Positive psychologists take center stage in their work reviewing passion as a concept separate from a moral purpose and exploring positive mindsets and behaviors under the umbrella of passion like grit, gratitude, growth mindset, and optimism (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014; Duckworth et al., 2007; Dweck, 2008; Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; Peterson & Chang, 2003). Each of these concepts has a nuanced perspective of the mental map it takes to feel and think in an engaged way. For this study, the thread of passion and engagement is not only akin to positive psychology's buzz words but also, within education particularly, the concept of flourishing illuminates concepts of passion and engagement like liberation and dignity as educators strive to embed passion into their classrooms and their students every day through their pedagogy (Emdin, 2016; Freire, 2000; Hansen, 2000; hooks, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Passion, as a possible thread of flourishing, could be a facet of teacher-leaders' description and understanding of flourishing, which I ask about in my research question.

Passion as vital engagement. First, in positive psychology, passion is often seen through engagement, which resonates with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of an optimal experience when "a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile" (p. 3). This raises an important note that to be engaged may also include struggle. Exploring the concept of engagement, Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) connected their concepts of vital engagement, flow, and emergent motivation to the experience of meaning and flourishing. Vital engagement, for example, is complete involvement and intense participation, often similarly denoted as a calling when connected to work viewed as

a career. Drawing from Dewey (1958), Mead, (1948), and Vygotsky's (1978) theories, they defined flow relative to optimal functioning and learning when people are lost in time or swept away in a calling that signifies a relationship between an object and the self. In other words, complete absorption in interaction with the world creates a state of flow, or "intense and focused concentration on the here and now; a loss of self-consciousness as action and awareness merge" (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 88).

As a result, a person's capacities may stretch into a set of complex skills from which proximal goals arise, or emergent motivation; therefore, the experience unfolds organically and can be a similar psychological function to learning as it cultivates growth. Ultimately, these experiences coalesce with meaning to create flourishing. Flourishing is more than a mere sense of enjoyment and is a form of *vital engagement* (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003), yet holds a sense of a larger purpose or significance. Offering that meaning can be born into or pulled out through the happenstance of family, culture and history or pushed upon an individual through adverse life experience that engender critical reflection. A significant insight into their work through the Creativity in Later Life Project (Gardner, 2011) is that engaging with a community of practice and having an ongoing or enduring connection leads to a more complexly and deeply meaningful relationship to the world, wherein people use words such as "awestruck," "entranced," or "enthralled" relative to their work and their life (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003, p. 99). These words elucidate the passions that are intimately tied to experiences with heightened, or vital, engagement. In concordance with the first research question, I asked eight teacher-leaders how, if at all, they flourish throughout their careers, and seek to understand ways it may or may not include passion through vital engagement.

Purpose and Meaning

For this study, the concept of purpose as a part of flourishing involves the moral, ethical, and spiritual meanings people attribute to their work, lives, and relationships (Bell, 2016; Dorrien, 2011; Han, 2015; Higgins, 2011; Lambersky, 2016; Nouwen, 2014). An important aspect of purpose and meaning is self-efficacy and ability to *pursue* purpose or follow a life's goal that culminates in the concept of following one's calling or vocation (Caprara et al., 2006; Hansen, 1994, 2007; Klassen et al., 2010; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012). To think of teaching as a calling, however, requires a prominence on building relationships with others and emphasizing trust, care, and compassion (Day & Gu, 2010; Hargreaves, 1998; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013; Harrits, 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Zembylas, 2003).

Purpose as a calling. Purpose is an important aspect of flourishing because it ties the notion of meaning to life's experiences. For example, the concept of vocation embraces the both/and of giving and receiving the fullness of self in a work that feels much greater than the self, such as some view is inherent in the teaching profession (Hansen, 1994). Although Hansen (1994) did not explicitly list the life of a teacher as flourishing, he discussed how the concept of a vocation or feeling devoted to teaching as a life calling is a concept worth resurrecting. In other words, if the teacher-leaders in this dissertation study felt their work was not merely a job but a vocation, then it "calls attention to the personal and moral dimensions of the practice that draw many persons to it from the start, and that keep them successful within it despite adversity and difficulty" (p. 261). The emphasis here is that it despite the challenges, the teachers or people driven by a purpose do not get mired in the struggles but feel the agency and know that their work is more than a job, allowing them to invest more emotion and care into their work. Conway (2012) found this to be true in her dissertation study that focused on 11 recently tenured

professors who deemed their work as not primarily a struggle because they were flourishing in their careers. This did not mean they were blind to the struggle, but that other emotions and devoted feelings of meaning took the forefront as they experienced challenge or struggle.

Purpose through emotions. In this section, emotions such as trust and care are important to teachers finding purpose in their work (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). For example, a comparative case study found that higher-achieving schools often have care as a core value and structures that emphasize interpersonal relationships, specifically in urban schools (Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016). Relationships, especially those with the principal, and his or her interest in showing the teachers respect, acknowledging their sacrifice, and allowing teacher voices to be heard in school are important in shaping teachers' emotions and their feeling of purpose (Lambersky, 2016). Overall, since the 1990s, educational scholars in Canada like Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves have emphasized the value of care, trust, and positive emotions present and at the “heart of teaching” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835) that give the profession its moral purpose (Stager & Fullan, 1992). Pursuing the ideas of emotions in the teaching profession tends to go back to the purposes teachers have in showing trust, care, and compassion, which questionnaires used in over 50 different schools have identified as behaviors linked to benevolence, reliability, honesty, openness, and other qualities (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; O'Connor, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Zembylas, 2003).

In addition to the inherent emotional purposes of teaching, the concept of flourishing inherently emphasizes the moral purpose of one's life as well because “without purpose, our life will drift with no direction, leading to a valueless life” (Han, 2015, p. 294; also see Damon, 2008). Therefore, as described, scholarship in philosophy emphasized moral virtues and purposes while education researchers who focus on teachers explored emotions. In the next section, I

explain how positive psychology and theology also expand on the constructs of purpose and meaning as crucial aspects to the experience of human flourishing.

Purpose as well-being. First, in the field of positive psychology, the question of whether or not someone leads a purposeful and meaningful life is the first listed on the flourishing scale questionnaire created by positive psychology (Diener et al., 2010). Overall, scholars in positive psychology have discussed the importance of purpose and meaning as a central part of well-being theory, which is a concept made up of positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014). Seligman (2011) offered that “The Meaningful Life consists in belonging and serving something you believe is bigger than the self” (p. 12). Similarly, purpose and meaning are different than success and achievement or just gaining something like a goal because research has shown that the mind’s excitement is relatively fleeting upon reaching success (Haidt, 2006). This *Adaption Principle* or ability for humans to recalibrate has been called the “hedonic treadmill” by Brickman and Campbell (1971) as a way of illustrating that the pleasures of accumulating riches or successes tend to be futile in changing “the natural state of tranquility” (Haidt, 2006, p. 86). This concept provides a contrast of the often-explained purpose in life, which many claim and problematize with the limited synonyms of *happiness* or *success* (Achor, 2011, 2013); however, as explained in the beginning, these fleeting emotions vary greatly from the concept of purpose/meaning or vocation. This is how research has defined a crucial aspect of flourishing, but for my dissertation study, I sought to learn how a group of eight teacher-leaders understood purpose and meaning, as indicated in my first research question.

Do these eight teacher-leaders experience meaning in their work and is the meaning more than fleeting happiness or temporary success? Is teaching, for these eight teacher-leaders, a

vocation that leads to flourishing? These are the questions I brought with me to the eight teacher-leaders in this study. Offering insight into this foundational question, theologian Rob Bell (2016) pointed to the Japanese who have a word for “what gets you out of bed in the morning: they call it your *ikigai*” (p. 56). Therefore, the concepts of a calling, a purpose greater than self, full of positive emotions like care and trust, are crucial to giving a person a reason for not only being or enduring, but also for being able to get out of bed and thrive. This is why in my research question, I sought to learn and understand how the eight teacher-leaders in my study described their own flourishing throughout their careers, if they did at all, by paying close attention to three key times in their career: the beginning (Years 1-3), the National Board Certification (>4 years), and most recently (AY 2017-2018). I wondered if they experienced purpose and meaning and how, if at all, it connected to flourishing.

In the next section, I explain the last thread of flourishing that I believe is integral to a flourishing life, which is practical wisdom or *phronēsis* (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095b), the prudence and sensitivity to context combined with excellence in practice cultivated over time (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Halverson, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Wallace, 1988).

Practical Wisdom

The thread of flourishing that encompasses the application of passion and purpose to life in subtle ways is Aristotle’s concept of *phronēsis* (Aristotle, 2011, line 1095b). A type of knowledge associated with wisdom, *phronēsis* is the theoretical wisdom of a person to adjust his or her knowledge to contexts, which some translate to mean prudence (Aristotle, 1869). In fact, teacher educator bell hooks (2010) captured the application of practical wisdom to teaching when she stated it is an “awareness that knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value

and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know” (p. 185). In addition to being a cyclical process as she conveyed, an important principle of practical wisdom is that this is not a virtue that people learn in trainings or through professional development; instead, it is a sensitivity to the particulars of a situation or context that one develops over time (Halverson, 2004; MacIntyre, 2007). Although practical wisdom is nearly impossible to operationalize into behaviors (Halverson, 2004; Schussler & Murrell, 2016), I offer a few ways that teachers who lead and, perhaps, flourish may evidence practical wisdom. The three frames I offer are intertwined and inseparable to convey the cyclical nature of practical wisdom. They are practical wisdom as reflective practice (Eryaman, 2007; Higgins, 2001, 2011), practical wisdom as critical praxis (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Freire, 2000; hooks, 2010), and practical wisdom as discernment in problem solving (Hustedde, 2015; Schussler & Murrell, 2016; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006),

Practical wisdom as reflective practice. Reflective practice has been a staple in teacher education for decades (Brookfield, 2017; Drago-Severson, 2013; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schön, 1987); however, through the lens of practical wisdom, Higgins (2001) explored *phronēsis* as an outcome of fresh and intentional reflection over time. In other words, teachers may flourish who have learned to initiate the internal conversation and consider making slight or imaginative adjustments in interpretation in light of new encounters (see Nussbaum & Brock, 1986). Unlike Schön’s (1987) concept of reflection, which acts as means to an end, the reflection in practical wisdom aligns with a moral purpose (Higgins, 2001). For example, the reflection produced Maxine Greene’s (1970) “wide-awakeness” rather than a numbing and habituated thinking (Higgins, 2001, p. 99). Reiterating that practical wisdom “is not teachable in any ordinary sense,” the ability of teachers to reflect on their day-to-day is an internal integration of

experience with new insights (Higgins, 2001, p. 97). In other words, over time and through “authentic field-based practice” (Schussler & Murrell, 2016, p. 281), teachers who reflect internally on their practice tend to not repeat old habits and, in light of *phronēsis* and the moral virtues, may flourish. Importantly, integrating virtues such as courage and justice helps guide reflection away from rote repetition and into the realm of moral teaching. As Higgins (2001) keenly noted, “unreflectiveness is not merely inflexibility but [is] a kind of moral blindness” (p. 93). For the teacher-leaders in this study, reflective practice may be one thread of practical wisdom. While reflection is an action in and of itself, how teachers decide to act upon their reflections is an important part of practical wisdom, which I highlight as critical praxis.

Practical wisdom as critical praxis. The subsequent step to reflection, as described by psychological and educational researchers (Brookfield, 2017; Drago-Severson, 2013; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schön, 1987) is application. I offer, however, that the “self-responsibility” and prudence to act on reflection of new experiences is worthy of exploration on its own, even though it often happens simultaneously to the act of reflection (hooks, 2010, p. 185). For this study, I refer to moral reflection in action as critical *praxis* or practice, and suggest that teacher-leaders who flourish with practical wisdom have the “moral skill and the moral will” to strategically, proficiently, and ethically act (Schussler & Murrell Jr, 2016, p. 288). The word *critical* highlights how this interpretation resonates with Freire’s (2000) critical consciousness and his claim that critical awareness propels people to transform and act more fully with life. Aristotle, too, referred to *praxis* (Aristotle, 2011, line 1065b) as the doing or practice of human action, and for practical wisdom this praxis includes reflection on the situation, on the self, on the past, and on moral virtues such as courage, justice, and self-control (Melé, 2010). As an example of critical praxis, hooks (2013) captured Parker Palmer’s (1977, 2017) words regarding

teaching as requiring a blend of cognitive or mental reflection with the head and integrating virtues that we now consider related to the heart:

As good teachers weave the fabric that joins them with students and subjects, the heart is the loom on which the threads are tried, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight. Small wonder, then, that teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be. The courage to teach is the courage to keep one's heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able so that teacher and student and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning and living require. (p. 19)

Similar to Aristotle's teleological claims of function, critical praxis re-focuses the self towards a larger function and elevates the capacity to see the bigger picture even in smaller circumstances.

This combined head-heart thinking and acting, or praxis, is an important facet of practical wisdom that co-exists with reflection. Additionally, scholars in human development also offer that wisdom itself is a critical process with "meta-criterion," such as the management of uncertainty, the acknowledgement and tolerance of relativism, and contextualism, which show the complex synthesis of reflection and action (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000, p. 125). Arguing that these processes develop in humans over a lifetime, Baltes and Staudinger's (2000) showed the possible integration of Aristotle's philosophical tenets with modern psychology. Finally, to see reflection and critical praxis within the profession of teaching, I believe flourishing teacher-leaders may also show discernment in problem solving and problem framing, explained next.

Practical wisdom as discernment in problem solving. As the result of reflection and experience, practical wisdom may evidence as a keen eye in problem solving, according to education leadership scholar Richard Halverson (2004). Borrowing from Aristotle's in-depth description of wisdom as a way to apply knowledge in the context of practice, Halverson (2004) described how leaders acquire an "phronetic eye" (p. 4) to discern what is best in daily decision making. Positive psychologists Schwartz and Sharpe (2016) explained that this may also be the

master virtue, which bolsters the position that it is *the way* leaders see or frame problems that is most important to solving it. In other words, practical wisdom is the ultimate strength, or virtue, that helps build a “network of strengths” that can lead to a flourishing life because wisdom is the discernment of which values are most important when considering dilemmas, problems, or conflicts (p. 392). Importantly, this discernment is more than a logical reductionism of problem-solving; instead, philosopher MacIntyre (2007) explained that it means someone “who knows how to exercise judgment in particular cases” and thus is an intellectual virtue intimately connected to character virtues like courage (p. 154). As an example, education policy scholars have constantly debated how to measure good teaching, yet using the lens of practical wisdom helps to “envision quality teaching is less a matter of ‘having the right stuff’ than it is a matter of developing the capacity to ‘do the right thing the right way’ even under challenging circumstances” (Schussler & Murrell, 2016, p. 277). Veteran teachers know these are split-second dilemmas, like making copies for a test or helping students with their homework, and that practical wisdom is the constant discernment that can work at both the “micro- and macro-levels” of particular contexts (p. 281). The micro-level is where Halverson (2004) recommended that teachers create artifacts to show their wisdom, yet Aristotle conveyed that practical wisdom is an internal process much harder to operationalize externally in consistent and scaled ways.

In sum, practical wisdom is a combination of reflective practice, critical praxis, and discernment for problem solving that teachers develop over time, combined into one complex strand of how teacher-leaders might describe and understand their own flourishing. As this integrative literature review conveyed, the elements of practical wisdom might co-exist with passion and purpose to cultivate a flourishing life for a teacher-leader, yet I left this as an open-ended wondering for the participants in this study. As my first research question asked: How, if

at all, do they flourish in their careers and what factors help and/or hinder their flourishing, or, ultimately, their ability to live, teach, and lead well?

Chapter Summary

The goal of this study was to explore with eight teachers-leaders how they describe and understand flourishing, if they do at all, and how they describe the encouragers of and obstacles to their flourishing throughout their careers, specifically in their first 3 years, after their fourth year when they participate in their National Board Certification, and within the last academic year.

In this literature review, I first described my approach to crafting the conceptual framework. Then, I examined the national context of teacher turnover and teacher endurance before zeroing in on the local context of “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) in North Carolina. To do so, I explained the fundamentals of constructive-developmental theory to highlight the possible existence of holding environments (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) through the practices that I believe align with Drago-Severson’s (2009) Pillar Practices in Wake County, North Carolina. Next, I described teacher-leadership and included its evolution over time and its specific definition and iterations through the two programs central to this study, the North Carolina Teaching Fellows and National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. Finally, I explained the historical and modern interpretations of flourishing. Although I gleaned the meaning of flourishing for this study from salient literature, I defined it broadly as an experience that captures passion, purpose, and practical wisdom to maintain an open mind to the lived experiences of teacher-leaders. To be clear, I created an open-ended research question and a broad description of flourishing because I asked the teachers to describe their stories, which

hopefully provided nuanced and divergent perspectives of flourishing, if they did at all, in their careers. The phrase *if at all*, as listed in all three research questions, is also crucial to my study because it is a possibility that teachers do not experience flourishing and instead barely endure or have completely divergent experiences.

Ultimately, while flourishing may be elusive, the wondering that this integrative literature review (Torraco, 2016) and conceptual framework captured was whether the teacher-leaders of North Carolina have had careers in which they live, teach, and lead well in the midst of an increasingly complex environment of public schools.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I explain my research design and methodology in detail. The purpose of this research was to learn from eight teacher-leaders in Wake County, North Carolina how they describe and understand their own flourishing, if they did at all, throughout their careers—in the beginning years (1-3 years), during their National Board Certification process (>4 years), and in the last academic year (2016-2017). The subsequent questions asked how they describe the encouragers of and obstacles to their flourishing, if they did at all.

To outline this chapter on methodology, I first review the research questions for this study. Next, I explain the research design and why I chose a qualitative approach (Maxwell, 1996, 2005, 2013). Then, I describe the research relationship I established with the interview participants (Clandinin, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). Importantly, I next explain the criteria for how I selected the field setting or research site and the participants for this study (Maxwell, 2013). After describing selection criteria, I clarify how I adapted Seidman's (2013) phenomenological-based in-depth interviews as my primary method for data collection. Subsequently, I describe the data analysis procedures for this study and how I paid specific attention to validity threats related to research design through addressing researcher bias, reactivity, and various validity threats in relation to interpretation (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al.,

2014; Seidman, 2013). In the last sections, I examine the limitations of this study and possible extensions of this research in the future. I conclude with a summary of the chapter.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this study grew out of the literature and evolved throughout the proposal process to focus and narrow the study. Although I began my dissertation with an intention to explore all three questions listed below, I focused this dissertation study only on the first question because of the complex and multifaceted nature of teacher-leader flourishing according to the eight participants in this study. For this study, the research questions were as follows:

1. How, if at all, do eight National Board Certified NC Teaching Fellows currently serving in secondary public schools in Wake County, NC, describe and understand their own flourishing (i.e., in the beginning years teaching (1-3 years), in the National Board Certification process (after Year 4), and in the last academic year (2016-2017)?
2. How, if at all, do these NC teacher-leaders describe and understand the encouragers to their flourishing?
3. How, if at all, do these NC teacher-leaders describe and understand the obstacles to their flourishing?

My research questions focused on the specific context of public high schools, or secondary schools, in Wake County, North Carolina, and I defined the participants as teacher-leaders using the criteria of NCTF who are also National Board Certified teachers, because the research questions, posed with particular terms in specific contexts, have several advantages (Maxwell, 2013). One advantage of narrowing the focus of the questions was that it helped me as the researcher recognize diversity among individuals and hone in on the “specific beliefs, actions

and events that [I] observe or ask about, and the actual contexts in which these are situated” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 79). The words *describe and understand* were important as well because I was interested in thick descriptions of how the participants made sense of their experiences (Geertz, 1973; Seidman, 2013).

For this study, I used the terms *experience* and *stories* interchangeably because when participants put experiences into language, they tend to create “a beginning, middle, and end thereby making them into stories” (Seidman, 1991, p. 12). Also, because the phenomena under study are the lived stories of flourishing, my intellectual goals were to learn with the participants about the meaning and context they gave those experiences (Maxwell, 2013). In the next section, I clarify the epistemological lens I brought to the research and explain how and why I chose a qualitative in-depth interview design rather than a quantitative approach for this study.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

In this section, I describe how I approached the research design with a constructivist epistemology (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013), a qualitative paradigm (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013), and an intent to honor and “re-story” (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 202) the lived experiences of the participants in the study.

Constructivist Epistemology

To embark on this research journey, I explored my epistemological lens, which is the researcher’s philosophical perspective of how people learn to know what they know (Clandinin, 2013; Creswell, 2013). For this in-depth interview study, my epistemological stance aligned with the interpretive framework of constructivism, the perspective that reality is constructed with subjective meanings (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). This subjectivity is important as it conveys no story is complete or contains an objective truth. This is unlike quantitative studies

that derive from paradigms of positivists or post-positivists who lean towards an objective view of the world through variables and statistical relationships (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, because I sought to learn from the subjective and constructed lives of eight teacher-leaders in Wake County, I decided a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, approach best fit my study.

Qualitative Paradigm

For this study, I chose to collect qualitative data because I focused on “natural occurring, ordinary events in natural settings” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 11). Additionally, because of my constructivist epistemology (Maxwell, 2013), I explored *how*, rather than *what*, the group of eight teacher leaders in Wake County described and understood about their own flourishing. Therefore, a qualitative method best fit my study over a quantitative method or survey method, which would have focused on strictly observable variance between variables (Maxwell, 2005). Unlike quantitative studies, which measure predetermined relationships and variables, I sought to attain a rich story full of thick description that would allow me to collect and analyze concrete, contextualized stories from the participants’ perspective (Geertz, 1973; Maxwell, 2005, 2013). Also, in qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) described how making meaning “include[s] cognition, affect, intentions, and anything else that can be included” from the participants’ perspective (p. 17). Ultimately, a qualitative approach best fit my epistemological stance and my intellectual goals, which aligned with my research questions to understand (a) how participants make meaning of flourishing, (b) how the particular contexts may influence their lived experiences, and, specifically, (c) how they described and understood the supports and challenges that helped and/or hindered their flourishing, if they did (p. 30). In the next three subsections, I describe in greater detail the strengths of qualitative design, the specific qualitative method of in-depth interviews, and the lens of re-storying.

Strengths of qualitative design. The strengths of qualitative study included not only the emphasis on lived experiences and focus on context, but also flexibility and reflexivity. For example, the flexibility of qualitative methods concedes that theories and conclusions of research may be “simplified and incomplete” due to the complexity of reality (Maxwell, 2013, p. 47). Therefore, knowing I may not be able to capture the entirety of the participants’ lives, I, as the researcher, worked hard to honor their lived experiences as they conveyed them (Seidman, 2013). The acknowledgement that I, the researcher, am a part of the world she studies and acts in as a “powerful and inescapable influence” is known as “reflexivity” and is a part of the social constructivist nature of qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125). For the constructivist paradigm and qualitative research, my awareness of flexibility and attendance to reflexivity was important, especially in the interview research.

In-depth interviews. I administered qualitative, in-depth semi-structured interviews because they assist “listen[ing] to the explicit descriptions and to the meanings expressed, as well as to what is said ‘between the lines’” (Kvale, 2009, p. 32). Due to the nature of flourishing as an unexplored phenomenon for teacher-leaders, I adapted Seidman’s (2013) phenomenological in-depth interview approach, explained later in more detail. For this dissertation study design, the three areas of inquiry included: (a) flourishing, (b) encouragers to flourishing, and (c) obstacles to flourishing. Also, I asked the teacher-leaders about their stories in three distinct temporal moments throughout their career (i.e., first 3 years, while earning National Board Certification, and within the last year). This is why, in an effort to understand the lived stories of the participants’ meaning making, I chose a qualitative over a quantitative approach and used the lens of re-storying (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

Honoring voices. Ultimately, within the qualitative approach, I chose an in-depth interview methodology (Seidman, 2013) to honor the voice of the participants. For example, as the participants told their stories, I, the researcher, was the primary listener and assisted in the continuity of their story through my inquiry (Clandinin, 2013). I asked them about specific points in their careers and, through these points, offered a framework with a clear chronology. For this reason, I used the concept of “re-storying,” both because of its foundation in education leadership research (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 202), and because of its prevalence in positive psychology as a way to connect different points in a participant’s experience through common themes and with a specific purposing of a concept, like flourishing (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). In all three disciplines, the term *re-story* is a way to honor the voice of interviewees, tell their story, and attend to my own insights as the researcher.

In summary, I drew from a constructivist lens to complete a qualitative in-depth interview study with eight teacher-leaders to learn how they describe and understand their flourishing, if they do at all. In the next section, I explain the research relationship I built with the participants. Afterwards, I describe the selection criteria for my study.

Negotiating Research Relationship

Here, I explain how I negotiated and attended to the relationship with the participants in this study. Maxwell (2013) offered this as a crucial step and Seidman (2013) wrote an entire chapter on the process of building researcher relationships as comprising multiple steps and details worthy of attention. Several qualitative researchers have described how the ethics of research have become increasingly more problematic due to the implicit power structures between the researcher and the voice of the participant (Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). Therefore, in this section, I explain the importance of negotiating the “researcher [as] the

instrument of the research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 91). Because my methods were based in the in-depth qualitative interview, throughout the process I tried to be aware of my subjectivities, or the identities I brought with me (Maxwell, 2013). I was transparent with the complexity of “I’s” that I brought to the participants, specifically “I” as former teacher-leader, “I” as researcher, “I” as collaborator, and “I” as the critic (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10; Peshkin, 1988). To be mindful of these subjectivities, I wrote analytical memos (see the validity section of this chapter). I was also purposeful in building trust and being inclusive of the participants’ ideas as a crucial aspect to the kind of rapport I desired with each individual participant. Additionally, as the instrument, I realized I was a changing and evolving entity, so I was cognizant of the rapport to be open in nature and consider the “continual creation and renegotiating of trust, intimacy and reciprocity” with the participants (Maxwell, 2013, p. 92). To acknowledge the possible intrusion of my presence in addition to the possible ways they may have viewed me both as a stranger and a person with some familiarity with their context, I remained open to their needs and their changing schedules. Therefore, staying true to the qualitative method of interviewing and working hard to understand the possible power difference in status that they may have perceived based on my researcher role, I continually observed, reflected, modified, and questioned the nature of the relationships I negotiated. As Maxwell (2013) referenced with his students, I believe the interview is not over until a “thank-you note is delivered” (p. 94).

In the next section, I explain the selection criteria for the participants. I followed Maxwell’s (2013) guidance about formulating a dissertation proposal order and explain the research “setting” and why I chose public high schools in Wake County, North Carolina as the research site. Finally, I explain how the selection criteria for the research site complemented the selection criteria for the eight teacher-leader participants, which also narrowed the definition of

teacher-leaders for my research and provided a foundation for studying teacher-leaders who have endured in schools and learn how, if at all, they flourish.

Selection of Site

In this section, I explain my rationale for the site selection and field setting as pertaining to understanding how eight teacher-leaders describe and understand their own flourishing, if they do at all throughout their careers. I also explore how they describe and understand the encouragers of and obstacles to their own flourishing, if they do at all. To be clear, for this study, I focused on the first primary research question. I could have chosen any type of public, private, or charter school to conduct this study, but my criteria for selecting public high schools in Wake County are explained and justified in the next section. The first criterion was that the schools for this dissertation research study be public.

Selection Criterion 1: Public Schools

I choose public schools, first, because they are one of America's "most important experiment in democracy" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 12). As a result, the majority of the teaching workforce enter into public schools. For example, according to studies by the U.S. Department of Education, "In the 2007-08 school year, there were an estimated 119,150 K-12 schools in the United States: 87,190 traditional public, 3,560 public charter, 180 funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), and 28,220 private schools" (n.p.). Therefore, although the results of this study cannot be generalizable to a population, they do offer fodder for future research within a public education setting with an immense diversity of student populations. It is worth repeating that this was not a study concerned with generalization but rather "with developing an adequate description, interpretation, and explanation of this case" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 71). As there are several different varieties and levels of public schools, the next criteria to

narrow the focus of my research was that the teacher-leaders teach in a public high school setting.

Selection Criterion 2: High Schools

The second criterion for my study was to select a group of eight teacher-leaders who were currently teaching in secondary public schools, also known as high schools, due to my personal familiarity with this level of school. I was aware that secondary schools have multiple opportunities for teacher leadership, a fact that complements the participant selection criteria, and complex structures that incorporate PLCs, school improvement teams, and the like (Berry & Farris-Berg, 2016). Although I defined the term *teacher-leaders* in Chapter II, I explain more about the participant criteria for teacher-leaders later in this chapter.

I also narrowed the high schools to include those that fit most closely to the descriptions of rural and Title 1 because in addition to urban settings, these contexts are where teacher turnover is most prevalent in the district and the nation (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). Title 1 refers to schools with high poverty, at least 40% of students must qualify for free and reduced lunch, and low resources according to *No Child Left Behind* and continued most recently by the *Every Child Succeeds Act* (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). The definition of rural aligns with the Census Bureau locale classification system, which subdivides rural into two groups: (a) areas that are less than or equal to five miles from urbanized area in order to be “fringe rural,” and (b) areas that are up to 25 miles away from an urbanized area to be “remote local”; therefore, according to these definitions, almost half (44.2%) of North Carolina schools are rural and 50% are eligible for free and reduced lunch (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2006). To be clear, the public high schools for this study drew from a mix of

“fringe” rural populations. The next section explains the district from which I invited the teacher-leaders.

Selection Criterion 3: Wake County, North Carolina

Although I focus this section on why I chose this district of Wake County, I first explain my criteria for choosing the state of North Carolina. North Carolina was a strong state and site for my study because of the extensive data available on its students, teachers, schools, and districts through its history of testing, such as through the accountability system known as the ABCs that measured the growth of all schools starting in 1995 (Accountability Procedures Manuel, 2004), and through the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (ncteachingconditions.org, 2014). Plus, the state supports programs that I consider to provide potential holding environments or relationships that create developmentally optimal spaces for adults to grow and feel “honored for who they are” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) (see Chapter II), where teachers can grow into leaders like the program of the NCTF, which was a state-funded solution to recruit the top 10% of high school students to the teaching profession through college scholarships in order to address the looming teacher shortage crisis of the 1980s and 1990s (Cohen, 2015).

I chose Wake County District in North Carolina for three distinct reasons. The first reason was personal. I grew up in Wake County and felt that this research study would be not only a way of giving back—by using my research questions to understand problems I experienced as a student and a teacher in my hometown—but also a first step into a lifelong agenda of understanding public schools in the state. The second reason, tangentially related, was my familiarity and previous relationships that I thought would enable ease of access (discussed further in the Access to Wake County subsection). The third reason I chose Wake County was

because of how it is situated in North Carolina, as the largest county in the state and the sixth largest in the nation (ncpublicschools.org, 2016). Because of this, it has 26 secondary schools with Grades 9-12. Moreover, the district has several resources for teacher growth and development such as curriculum-writing opportunities and equity trainings in addition to support systems and mentor connections to assist with National Board Certification (ncwake.gov). Interestingly, Wake County has had more National Board Certified teachers than any other district in the nation for the last 9 years (Wake County Public School System, 2016). Because the district had a high density of potential participants who participated in this National Board Certification in this specific site, the potential high schools with teacher-leaders increased, thus complementing the opportunity of finding participants that fit my criteria..

In summary, the following criteria helped me to choose my field site:

1. Public: Diversity of students and microcosm of national norms;
2. High school with familiarity and access due to similar contexts and opportunities for both formal and informal leadership roles; and
3. Wake County, North Carolina: District with a variety of teacher-leadership opportunities: specifically possible holding environments (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) (possible examples include National Board Certification and NCTF).

In addition to the above criteria for possible public high schools in Wake County, North Carolina, the opportunity for access was important for my study because it helped me limit the possible 26 schools to the six that best fit my criteria.

Access to Wake County. I was aware that gatekeeping and ease of access were of concern (Berg & Lune, 2011), so I planned to choose a district where I had a professional

relationship with the leaders. Because familiarity can also be a concern and possible limitation (see the validity section), I also emailed a gatekeeper, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources, to learn more about access to the Wake County Public School System in advance (March 10, 2016), and to learn about the procedures for IRB in the Wake County Public School District (see Appendix D, Letter to Informant). He and I have worked together in the past and built a trustful rapport based on our mutual care for Wake County. As I worked on my proposal, the Assistant Superintendent introduced me to the IRB coordinator of Wake County who confirmed that after receiving IRB approval from my school (Teachers College), they would review my application. It is important to note that I did not seek approval from Wake County until I first received IRB approval (see Appendix I, Teachers College IRB Application and Appendix J, WCPSS IRB Application). I merely inquired to see if conducting research there would be possible until I received IRB approval (see Appendix K, Teachers College IRB Approval Letter). I also networked to meet leaders in the Public School Forum who were able to send me a list of teachers with National Board Certification and NCTF status and in unfamiliar schools to maintain some “deliberate naiveté” (Kvale, 1996, p. 33). These previous connections allowed for some familiarity and rapport between the participants and myself since we all shared experiences earning our National Board Certification and going through the NCTF program (Maxwell, 2013, p. 66). As mentioned, familiarity also could have led to possible limitations and validity threats (Luttrell, 2010; Maxwell, 2013).

Through these connections, I narrowed the 26 high schools down to the six that I preview below in Table 6 (also presented as Table 1 in Chapter I) since each school has a large pool of possible participants and has similar demographic information, such as more than 2,000 students, more than 100 teachers, and so on.

Table 6

Possible Sites (2015-2016)

School Name	Number of Students	Number of Teachers	Free and Reduced Lunch	Performance Composite
School 1	2,300	120	15%	>70%
School 2	2,400	140	35%	>70%
School 3	2,600	150	45%	<50%
School 4	2,400	130	20%	>70%
School 5	2,400	140	35%	<70%
School 6	2,000	110	30%	>70%

From this list of public high schools in the Wake County Public School System, I invited 12 participants from the field setting of School 2, School 3, and School 5 because of their homogeneity, meaning a similarity of context and demographics, which would reduce the contextual variety between participants so I could focus on their individual lived experiences (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014). I continued to invite participants from Schools 6, 4, and 1 in that order until at least eight participants accepted invitations. I used this order based on the similarity of free and reduced lunch as a priority factor and demographic between the schools. The next section explains the selection criteria for the participants in my study. Following, I also explain how I invited participants and discussed the informed consent.

Selection of Participants

Here, I describe my rationale and criteria for selecting the participants whom I describe as teacher-leaders and who work in the sites I previously listed of public high schools in Wake County, North Carolina.

Selection Criterion 1: Wake County Public School System Teachers

In 2014, there were approximately 3.5 million teachers in this nation (NCES, 2014). For my dissertation, I focused on a select group of teachers that I described as teacher-leaders. The

criteria I used to determine teacher-leaders began with the narrowing of possible teachers to those in the geographic location of Wake County, North Carolina, which currently has approximately 10,225 teachers, as of /the 2016-2017 school year (Wake County Public School System, 2016). I also chose this location because of my familiarity and access to potential holding environments (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) within the school district and the state, including but not limited to the NCTF and National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.

Selection Criterion 2: Teacher-Leaders

I then I narrowed down the teachers based on those I describes as teacher-leaders, which the previous literature review offered as teachers who aspire to grow and lead beyond their classroom (Drago-Severson, 2016; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015). I also limited teacher-leader participants to those who participated in two programs that help cultivate leaders through potential holding environments (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) (i.e., NCTFs and NBCT programs).

For this dissertation study, 591 teachers were NBCTs and NCTFs in Wake County and 54 were in secondary public schools. The criteria of teacher leaders, though defined in the literature within multiple waves (Holland et al., 2014), were too diffuse for my study, so I decided upon criteria that aligned with Fairman and Mackenzie (2015). I also limited the teacher-leaders to those who first were NCTFs and showed a commitment to more than a job, but a potential career, through their act of signing a teaching contract at age 18; studies have shown these included some of the best teachers in the state (Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012). Second, I selected NCTFs who have National Board Certification because researchers have deemed them to be highly effective with student outcomes and they themselves (87%) saw a positive impact

on student learning (Petty et al., 2016). Narrowing down to secondary high school teachers, I had 54 teachers, but in the six schools I selected, I narrowed it further to 26 for my possible eight.

Selection Criterion 3: Veteran or Career Teacher-Leaders

Last, and most importantly, I chose veteran teachers or teachers who defied the teacher turnover odds and persisted in the classroom beyond 10 years. I have experienced many complex and adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 1994) in the district and the state (Jacob et al., 2012)—that is, challenges that have no clear answer or solution. Moreover, as I described in Chapter II, the last decade with the Great Recession and multiple changes in the state’s legislative policies created multiple adaptive challenges, most prominently including draconian budget cuts (Speaks, 2014). This criterion applied to 26 eligible teachers within the district.

To be clear, I had three criteria for selecting teachers to interview:

1. high school/secondary school teacher,
2. identified by criterion as teacher leader (NBCT and NCTF), and
3. more than 10 years of experience (i.e., experienced complexity of adaptive challenges)

Again, these criteria applied to a potential sample that included 26 possible teachers for interviews. Although I would have liked to interview all 26 teachers, I limited my study to eight because this was just the first phase. To invite the participants, I purposefully sent invitations to three to four teachers from three different schools. My ultimate goal was to have at least eight participants from at least two different schools to complete all three interviews. To complement Table 6 which listed the basic information of the six schools, Table 7 now lists the teacher statistics within each school, with the three most similar schools in bold (i.e., School 2, School 3, and School 5). Though this was the original plan, the final eight participants taught at four of the

schools: Schools 1, 2, 4, and 5. With one participant from School 1 and one participant from School 2, the majority of participants were from Schools 4 and 5. This breakdown allowed for me to both focus on the participants' meaning making and on the different ways the individuals made meaning within similar and different contexts (Miles et al., 2014).

Table 7

Potential Teacher-Leader Participants by Site

School Name	Number of Teachers (approximate)	Percent of NBCT (approximate)	Percent with > 4 Years of Experience (approximate)	Percent Turnover (approximate)	Percent Meeting or Exceeding Student Growth (approximate)	Number of Potential Participants
<i>WCPSS Avg.</i>		<i>15.3</i>	<i>79.5</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>78.7</i>	<i>26</i>
School 1	120	20	80	10	85	4
School 2	140	20	90	10	90	3
School 3	150	20	80	15	85	5
School 4	130	25	85	10	100	5
School 5	140	20	80	16	85	4
School 6	110	20	90	14	95	4

Again, the four schools highlighted are the schools in which the final eight participants taught. In the next section, I explain how I did my best to protect the confidentiality of these eight participants.

Confidentiality of Participants

In the informed consent (see Appendix E), I explained that the participants' identities would be kept confidential and all data would be secured in a locked in a digital database (Seidman, 2013). I personally emailed the potential participants to explain the study and asked if they would be willing to talk by phone and learn more about the study and opportunity to participate (see Appendix F, Invitation to Participate). If they did not respond to my email, I followed up with a subsequent email and explained that the interviews would be confidential; I

asked if they would agree to volunteer specific times for us to meet for the interviews (Seidman, 2013). The specifics of these are listed in the Interview Protocols of Interview #1, #2, and #3 (see Appendices A, B, and C).

Sampling Procedure

Although I would have liked to invite all 26 teachers who fit the criteria, I did have limited time and resources. Also, since this was the first phase of what I hope will become a longer-term research project, I did my best with the time I had. I initially invited 12 teachers into my study, knowing there may be some attrition. To do so, I purposefully invited three to four teacher-leaders from the first three schools. My goal was to have at least eight to 12 participants complete all three interviews. School 3 did not yield any participants, so I invited an additional set of participants from School 4. In total, I invited 17 participants which yielded eight teacher-leaders from four schools who responded they could participate (one teacher moved to a new school in Wake County since the data collection). One limitation worth noting here was that I realized after my first round of interviews that I had all White participants. I attempted a snowball sample strategy to learn if there were participants of color who met these criteria. In the short timeframe I had allotted for interviews, I was unable to find new participants, so the eight participants in this study were as a result of purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection

In this section, I review my methodology for collecting data in this in-depth qualitative interview study. To do so, I first explain the details of my data collection through the three in-depth semi-structured interviews and document collection.

In-depth Interviews

Three in-depth interviews were my primary qualitative data collection source. To collect data, I administered qualitative, in-depth interviews because they assist in “listen[ing] to the explicit descriptions and to the meanings expressed, as well as to what is said ‘between the lines’” (Kvale, 2009, p. 32). In this way, the interviews embrace the constructive nature of knowledge “through the interaction of the partners in the interview conversation” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 11). The focus of the interviews was to ask the participants about stories of flourishing at different times in their career; these stories focused on aspects that were supportive and challenging and how they were helpful to or hindered their flourishing. Because these may have been personal experiences and stories, the IRB protocols and rapport of trust and mutual respect were important ethical considerations. Because I adapted Seidman’s (2013) three in-depth interview style, it is necessary to understand the process for the three different interviews because they were my primary source of data, along with document collection.

Pilot of interview #1. To assist in the development and refinement of the interview protocols, I conducted a pilot interview with a former colleague in North Carolina. Through this experience, I learned that I needed to be specific in my probes and that the order of my questions needed to start with challenges and struggles before I discussed the possibility of flourishing. These two learnings gave me an opportunity to refine the protocol. I also discovered that the interviews only took 60 minutes, so I had time to be patient in my interviews—which I have personally discovered helps me slow down my naturally fast-paced talking style. I adjusted the initial protocol and the final protocol appears in Appendix A.

First interview. In the first in-depth semi-structured interview, I adapted Seidman’s (2013) *Life Histories* (see Appendix A, Interview Protocol #1). I asked for general reflections of

experiences and stories regarding the journey to teaching and the context of their first 3 years teaching (see Appendix A). The questions in this interview directly addressed the research question about how, if at all, participants describe and understand their own flourishing throughout these beginning years. I also asked about the supports and challenges they described as helping and/or hindering these experiences. More specifically, topics for this interview included the following: how they came to teach, how they became a NC Teaching Fellow, and how they experienced their first 3 years of teaching to attend to demographic information and Research Questions 1-3. This interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was semi-structured. As mentioned, I also requested to conduct this interview in person and in the location of the participants' choosing; thus, I conducted the first five of eight interviews in person.

The subsequent three interviews were via FaceTime. At least 24 hours before the interview, I sent each participant the Interview Protocol # 1 (Appendix A) and gave them notice that I would conclude the first interview by asking them for journal entries or documents related to their National Board Certification entry for subsequent document analysis (see Appendix A).

Second interview. In the second interview, like Seidman's (2013), *Details of the Experience*, I dove deeply into the meaning of flourishing and the supports and challenges of flourishing, if they did, at the second data point, the National Board Certification Process (>4 years) (see Appendix B, Interview Protocol #2). Originally, I hoped to also dive into the most recent year of teaching (AY 2017-2018); however, because I had several veteran teachers with more than 25 years of experience, they had not only passed their boards but renewed at the 10-year mark. Because of this depth of experience, I moved the AY 2017-2018 interview questions to the third interview. Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes, and I sent the participants the updated Interview Protocol #2 (Appendix B) at least a few hours in advance to give them time to

consider the questions because the interview directly addressed all three research questions at this data point.

Despite my scope, however, I focused on the first research question in this dissertation, not only as the participants described and understood their own flourishing in their first three years (first interview) but also as they earned their National Board Certification. This was a very important interview, and based on Seidman's (2013) recommendations, I attempted to have the second interview within 2 weeks of the first interview. This interview for all participants occurred over the phone, with four preferring FaceTime and four preferring audio calls. I recorded these interviews using my computer's GarageBand for best possible audio recording.

Third interview. The last interview included the second part of the original Interview #2 and, similar to narrative inquiry's collaborative storytelling (Clandinin, 2013), it was a purposeful reflective interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2013) (see Appendix C, Interview Protocol #3). In this interview, I included the Self-Q (Bougon, 1986), which means a question that asks participants how they would have approached research about teacher-leader flourishing. The goal of this question was to garner greater insights into their meaning making related to their own flourishing, if they did at all, for the first research question. The dynamic and in-depth nature of this and all the interviews aided in developing the probes as the participants and I moved through the simple structure of the protocol (see Appendix C, Interview Protocol #3). I completed these interviews primarily over the phone with one participant wanting to meet in person and one wanting to speak over FaceTime as exceptions to the rule.

Member check follow-up. Due to the shifting of the protocols and research questions, I completed explicit member checks a few months after the third interview to check my own deep listening with their meaning making (Maxwell, 2013). I sent each participant a Narrative

Summary (Miles et al., 2014) of their career trajectory that included my own interpretations and offered to send them the transcripts as well. I asked for their reactions, reflections, changes, deletions, and addendums in a 15-minute phone call to check the interpretive validity (Maxwell, 2013) of my work. I explain more in the upcoming validity section about the importance of member-checking as a tool to address interpretive validity threats.

Document Collection

Immediately following the first interview, I asked participants to send or share with me their entries into their National Board Certification Process. In addition, I asked if they would share any journal entries from teaching or any school materials to better understand the personal and social context of each participant (Maxwell, 2013) (see Appendix A, Interview Protocol #1). For four of the teachers, these documents included entries and writings they submitted as Teacher of the Year, a district-wide honor, and for one participant, the document review also included a video-documentary. These documents helped me understand the second data point (i.e., the process of earning their National Board Certification after at least 3 years of teaching) and allowed me to see their first-hand reflections about the experiences during that time and their teaching.

In Table 8, I explain the chronological of this process that resulted in approximately 32 hours of interviews and a minimum of 12-24 documents per participant.

Data Analysis

In this section, I explain how I analyzed my in-depth interview data through specific steps outlined by Miles et al. (2014), Maxwell (2013), and Seidman (2013). The methodological steps for this study included: transcription of interviews (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013), reflective and analytic memos (Maxwell, 2013), organizing and coding the data (Miles et al.,

2014; Seidman, 2013), narrative profiles (Seidman, 1991, 2013), and thematic analysis (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2013).

Table 8

Data Collection Timeline

Participants	Email Invitation	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Member Check
Molly	3/20/17	4/13/17 In Person 83 minutes	4/19/17 Phone Call 64 minutes	6/16/17 Phone Call 85 minutes	12/27/17 Phone Call 15 minutes
Alice	3/20/17	4/14/17 In Person 101 minutes	4/29/17 Phone Call 81 minutes	6/20/17 Phone Call 87 minutes	12/28/17 Phone Call 15 minutes
Danielle	3/9/17	4/14/17 In Person 76 minutes	4/20/17 Phone Call 102 minutes	6/19/17 Phone Call 84 minutes	12/29/17 Phone Call 15 minutes
Saul	3/20/17	4/14/17 In Person 87 minutes	4/26/17 Phone Call 71 minutes	6/15/17 Phone Call 86 minutes	12/29/17 Phone Call 15 minutes
Ella	3/20/17	4/14/17 In Person 62 minutes	5/8/17 Phone Call 64 minutes	7/6/17 In Person 84 minutes	12/27/17 Phone Call 15 minutes
Leigh	3/27/17	5/31/17 Face Time 70 minutes	6/7/17 Face Time 64 minutes	7/10/17 Phone Call 86 minutes	12/29/17 Phone Call 15 minutes
Patricia	3/20/17	5/9/17 Face Time 60 minutes	6/8/17 Face Time 89 minutes	7/10/17 Phone Call 78 minutes	12/29/17 Phone Call 15 minutes
Chris	3/28/17	7/5/17 In Person 91 minutes	8/9/17 Face Time 85 minutes	8/11/17 Face Time 61 minutes	12/30/17 Phone Call 15 minutes

To review these data analysis steps, which guided me through a description and analysis of data, I adapted a list style from Kanerek's (2016) dissertation proposal to show the iterative steps of data analysis I used for my dissertation study.

Review of Analytic Process

1. Wrote analytic memos after each interview to capture my initial connections, reactions, and reflections (Maxwell, 2013).
2. Recorded and transcribed interviews verbatim myself or via a third-party, Upwork, and then read back each transcript against the audio recording to check the accuracy of the transcript and to attend to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013).
3. Managed transcriptions and documents by uploading them to Dedoose, a digital qualitative analysis software. The choice to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was because it assists data management; however, I was aware of the potential downfalls such as coding too quickly or overcoding (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2013).
4. Coded transcripts (first cycle) using open, or descriptive, or inductive coding (Miles et al., 2014) to highlight the participants' voice to discover potential emerging ideas or explanations that are contrary to my assumptions or the current literature (interpretative validity) (Maxwell, 2013); in addition to finding emic codes, I also looked deductively for theoretical or etic codes from the literature (Miles et al., 2014) (for preliminary code list, please see Appendix G, Preliminary Codes).
4. Organized and categorized data (second cycle) in larger themes using both within-case and cross-case analysis (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2013).
5. Displayed data and wrote narrative summaries and profiles, contextualized and categorized (Maxwell, 2008), of teacher-leaders with anecdotes and vignettes that capture flourishing, supports, and/or challenges (Seidman, 2013). Then, used

additional data displays, matrices, tables, and concept maps to draw out themes (Miles et al., 2014).

I explain these steps in more detail next.

Analytic Memos

Although Seidman (2013) argued that it is best to keep interviewing and analysis separate, I believe that was against my natural proclivity and, as Miles et al. (2014) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) explained, ongoing analysis allowed increases sensitivity to emerging themes. Therefore, my analysis occurred throughout the interview process by analyzing the different subjectivities or “I’s” that I felt I brought with me to the interview (Peshkin, 1988). To acknowledge and catalogue my thinking throughout this research process, I wrote methodological memos in which I noted the decisions I made relative to adjusting my methods, theoretical memos to note interesting theories or connections to the literature, and observational memos when I connected-the-dots or saw ideas emerge outside of the analysis process (Drago-Severson, 2017, personal conversation).

Transcription of Interviews

I recorded each interview using GarageBand and a back-up hand-held recorder. I then sent each interview to a third-party transcriber for verbatim transcription through Upwork, a reliable freelancing transcription system. Finally, I checked the transcript against the audio recording for accuracy and descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013). I securely stored the digital files in a locked server through Teachers College called Mahara, but formerly known as Alfresco, which requires a secure log-in and provides enough storage for multiple interviews in mp3 form. Afterwards, I shared the transcripts with the participants, so they could check, add, or remove words and comments to ensure descriptive validity and assist with member checking.

Managing data. As I received the interview transcripts and finished checking them for descriptive validity against the audio, I uploaded transcripts and documents to Dedoose, a digital qualitative analysis software. I chose to use computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software because it assists data management; however, I was also aware of the potential downfalls such as coding too quickly or over-coding (Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2013). For this reason, I selected transcripts to code by hand for self-comparison.

Coding and Organization of Data

In this section, I describe the iterative process and phases I used to code the data. I first describe the resources I used. Next, I explain the first phase or first cycle of coding using both open or emic and etic or theoretical coding strategies (Miles et al., 2014). Then, I articulate my process for categorizing the data and conducting a thematic analysis of the data using within-case and cross-case analysis, which Miles et al. (2014) characterized as the second cycle of condensing the data. Finally, I explain how I displayed the data using narrative profiles (Seidman, 2013) and data matrices to draw out themes (Miles et al., 2014).

First cycle: Descriptive codes. Throughout the first rounds of coding, I followed traditional analytic procedures through broad strokes or open/descriptive coding (Miles et al., 2014); moreover, my coding strategy was to compare emic codes that emerged from the data and theory-driven and etic codes from my conceptual framework and research questions (Maxwell, 2013). Seidman (2013) referred to this process as reducing the text, while Miles et al. (2014) explained it as condensing the text, but both processes include a weeding out of what is less important and less interesting in the transcripts. The etic or theoretical codes are listed in Appendices G.

Second cycle: Patterns and cross-case analysis. To organize and condense the data further, I conducted the second cycle of coding and found patterns in the forms of categories, themes, relationships, causes, and theoretical constructs (Miles et al., 2014). In other words, I paid special attention to clusters of codes and combined them with related codes into broader categories and themes (Maxwell, 2013).

While finding patterns, I also used within-case analysis, with each participant as a singular, bound case (Miles et al., 2014). In so doing, I found themes to both deconstruct prior conceptions of flourishing as well as encouragers and obstacles, but also to “bracket” or find relevant passages that revealed essential components that may lead to assertions or propositions (Miles et al., 2014, p. 103). Next, I attended to cross-case analysis, which assists with “transferability to other contexts,” although this was not an inherent goal of this study (Miles et al., 2014, p. 101). In this way, I compared patterns between cases to find themes that cut across cases. Assisting in these iterative processes, I used the next step of crafting narrative profiles and data displays.

Data display: Narrative summaries, profiles, and matrices. The next step in the process was to create narrative summaries and profiles within the multiple hours of interviews of each participant or case (see Appendix L, Sample Narrative Profile). Seidman (2013) explained that this profile step is the storytelling the researcher does when the interview is over. To do so, I differentiated between narrative summaries and narrative profiles. I crafted narrative summaries for use in Chapter IV. By summary, I mean I integrated my personal synthesis of analysis with key direct quotes to offer a full, holistic picture of individual participants. Meanwhile, to create narrative profiles, I used bracketed texts and created mini-vignettes in the participants’ own words (see Appendix L, Sample Narrative Profile). I then contextualized them into narrative

summaries (Maxwell, 2008), or as Seidman (1991) explained, “the story is both the participant’s and the interviewer’s” (p. 92). This step required that I pay close attention to the precision of language with each participant and the contexts, similarities, and differences within the narratives (see Appendix M, Sample Narrative Summary). As the researcher, I used intentional liberty to concept the timeframes (i.e., beginning years, NBCT process, and within the last year) that helped illustrate their profiles in chronological order. To further this process relative to each research question, I also categorized other narrative profiles and displayed verbatim narratives or stories from the participants, and used the first-person voice to be faithful to the original intent (Seidman, 2013, p. 124). These profiles and, later, the contextualized summaries in addition to matrices helped me see the thematic connections, repetitions, and propositions or assertions I gleaned from the data (Miles et al., 2014). Table 9 displays the timeline for my data analysis.

Table 9

Tentative Data Analysis Timeline (2017)

Work in Progress	06.17	07.17	08.17	09.17	10.17	11.17	12.17	01.18	02.18
Analytic Memos	X	X	X						
Transcriptions	X	X	X						
First Cycle: Etic/Emic Codes	X	X	X	X					
Second Cycle: Patterns/Categories	X	X	X	X					
Narrative Vignettes and Profiles		X	X	X					
Matrices		X	X	X					
Synthesis Writing		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Draft Writing			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Chapter Edits				X	X	X	X	X	X

Validity

Here, I explain how I address the research biases, reactivity, and validity threats to the study. Because of the nature of qualitative research, validity is not a verification of soundness and objectivity; rather, it is “built into the research process with continual checks on the credibility, plausibility, and trustworthiness of the findings” (Kvale, 2009, p. 242). In fact, as systematically as possible, I identified possible threats to validity in this study through my processes of checking, questioning, and reflecting on my researcher bias, reflexivity, descriptive validity, and theoretical validity (Maxwell, 2013). As I was the research instrument and interviewer, I could have chosen words like authenticity and trustworthiness (Seidman, 2013); however, I believe validity aligned best with the analytic procedures of this study (Maxwell, 2013). First, I describe how I attended to researcher bias.

Researcher Bias

As a North Carolina native with personal experience with the North Carolina Teaching Fellows and National Board Certification, my investment in this topic and research was important to examine throughout the research. My own ties added to my commitment to this research (Maxwell, 2013; Peshkin, 1988), yet they also presented as the most viable threat. To examine researcher bias, I completed the following steps: (a) I carefully crafted my interview protocol to directly address my assumptions; (b) I checked my early findings with fellow researchers; (c) I wrote analytic memos; and (d) I searched for rival explanations and discrepant data to offer counterclaims to my findings. Each of these steps is described below.

First, I created the protocol to include questions and probes that were open-ended or included “if at all” in addition to asking several questions about struggles and challenges directly. For example, one of my assumptions going into the study, pointed out during my

proposal hearing, was that it sounded like I assumed that teachers who stayed must also flourish. To examine this possible assumption, I asked the participants in my study about how they felt about themselves and their colleagues with “Do you think that teachers who stay also flourish?” This is just one example, as several probes also ventured to check my assumptions based on my personal experiences and my expectations based on my literature review, which I discuss more in the theoretical validity section.

Second, I believe I could not be objective in this research, although I worked to remain mindful of my assumptions throughout the process of data collection and data analysis. For this reason, I discussed emerging opinions with fellow trained doctoral students whom I had asked to question me and play a *devil’s advocate* to my nascent claims. This dialogue continued with my adviser and sponsor, Dr. Drago-Severson, and my second reader, Dr. Megan Lavery, in the later stages of analysis through the drafts and comments on the chapters.

Third, to examine my assumptions, my identity, my experiences, and my reactions to participants, I wrote analytic memos to critically examine my position, my coding strategies, my coding judgments, and so on. By consistently asking questions of the data, I maintained sensitivity to how my own assumptions affected the data. For example, I recorded voice memos immediately after each interview to capture my impressions, so I could later analyze and question them against the transcripts. I also talked with fellow researchers in mini-conference calls to check my interpretations when I came to tentative conclusions throughout the summer.

To address these, I remained aware of as many visible and invisible characteristics I brought to the study as well as my history and experience. I created the protocol to include questions and probes that were open-ended or included “if at all” in addition to asking several questions about struggles and challenges directly. Maxwell (2013) noted that it is important for

qualitative researchers to understand how our “particular values and expectations may have influenced the conduct and conclusions for the study” (p. 124). For example, because I, like any researcher, do not claim any objectivity, my subjectivities or “I’s” were important to acknowledge as my part in the interview process was reflexive and influencing how participants told their stories and share their experiences (Peshkin, 1988).

Reactivity

As a researcher, I had subtle power to influence the setting and the individuals in my setting, which is known as reactivity (Maxwell, 2013). Similar to “reflexivity” in interviews (Maxwell, 2013, p. 125), I addressed my unavoidable influence, and the fact that these teachers might want to be impressive to a researcher, by asking the participants to choose settings that were familiar to them and tried not to use any leading questions throughout the interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Since I could never remove my influence as a female, White, doctoral student from the study, I did my best to use my insights productively by being aware of and transparent when appropriate about my personal experiences and any subtexts, visible or invisible, in the interviews and analysis. At the beginning of each interview, I use the protocol script to remind the interview participants that their story was most important and there were no right or wrong answers. I also acknowledged my past experiences as a teacher-leader and made the goals of my research clear as part of my initial efforts to recruit participants—and included these details as well in the informed consent forms.

Additionally, a primary tool I used in my data analysis was “member checks” in order to pay attention to the reflexivity I brought and to check my interpretations with the participants’ interpretations and incorporate their feedback (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). Through the member checks, I noticed that the participants were first most concerned with their self-representation.

For example, one participant corrected herself based on the transcript I included to say that she had not participated explicitly in the Outward Bound camp, but instead in a different outdoor program (she could not remember the name). Another participant asked if she had ever “completed a sentence” when she spoke, and another noted how often he said “like.” I had chosen not to edit their words for the summaries as I thought the hesitations, the pauses, and the “likes” conveyed the realness of their speech. Beyond these self-edits, all five of the ones I talked to on the phone were energized and shared that their current year was much better than the year before. In fact, the participant who had sounded most disappointed with the year’s end was cheerful and elated to report that she had a well-balanced schedule. Another participant excitedly said that she had been selected as teacher of the year. These new details came about when I shared the findings of what made teachers flourish, like their ability to solve problems. With this statement, perhaps much like an availability heuristic might suggest, they were eager to share more problems they had solved successfully although I pushed to learn more about the challenges that they had yet to solve. These honed my findings and made me feel more confident in these themes.

Descriptive Validity

In this section, I explain how I attended to descriptive validity (Maxwell, 2013). For example, I ensured all the interviews were transcribed verbatim (Maxwell, 2013). After receiving transcripts, I checked them against the recordings to ensure each transcript was verbatim. I also directed the transcriber to include laughter, and I made special notes to myself when there were long pauses. All of them ($n = 8$) stated it was because they did not have time due to the busy nature of teaching.

Interpretive Validity

Throughout the research, I was mindful of the possibility of interpretive validity threats, which are moments when I, as the researcher, could have allowed my own subjectivities or bias to misinterpret the words and meanings of participants (Maxwell, 2013). Within the research design, I revisited topics holistically in the third interview to provide additional opportunities to read their meaning making, specifically around flourishing, and reduce the chance of my interpretation. To attend to interpretive validity, I sought “respondent verification” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 244), also known as *member checks*, with the participants by sending their own narrative summary (see Chapter IV). According to Maxwell (2005), this “is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say” (p. 111). After I sent them the narrative summaries by email, I asked if they had time to speak on the phone and discuss the summary and my findings. In the phone calls, I shared with them my overall findings and received affirmations from all five who wanted to talk. Three did not take me up on the phone call but, instead, wrote to say it all was good, wished me the best of luck, and mentioned wanting to talk over the next summer to learn more.

To further review interpretive validity, I examined silences or what was not said (e.g., for example, if participants struggled to answer a question or specific terms or experiences were completely absent from the interview). I also offered to send the transcripts of all three interviews to the participants in an effort to ask them to correct any quotes or passages they felt did not accurately represent their thinking; however, they all responded that the narrative summaries (i.e., brief synthesis of their words and my interpretations) were sufficient representations and chose not to review the transcripts (Maxwell, 2013). An example of a specific strategy I utilized was the practice of deconstruction, mentioned by Czarniawska (2004, in Creswell, 2013). To further address interpretative validity, I triangulated the interview

transcript data with the National Board Entries and other documents I collected to the literature. Also, once I had reached several conclusions in my findings and through my coding matrices, I cross-checked my codes, my interpretations, and my analysis with a fellow trained researcher as I wrote my analytic chapters. While I would have liked to observe the participants teach and interact with their colleagues to strengthen the analytical claims and to address their understandings of Research Question 1 and how they flourish (Khan & Jerolmack, 2013), I did not have sufficient time or resources (see Limitations section).

Theoretical Validity

Finally, to address theoretical validity or the possibility that I had a myopic perspective due to my theoretical lens, thus limiting and narrowing the scope of this study, I searched for discrepant data and negative cases to disconfirm my theory or logic about what was going on (Maxwell, 2013). Specifically, I kept a running list of expectations and surprises in my analytic memos as I interviewed the participants. For example, I was surprised that most of the participants ($n = 6$) had parents who were teachers and the other two were first-generation college graduates. This singular finding suggested a family or value dynamic with education, which I could explore in a separate study. This did not relate directly to my findings; however, I was also surprised that all the participants considered themselves to flourish, which was my first research question. While their explanations were vastly different, I was not sure if all would claim to have flourished overall. To check this among other findings, I used coding charts to review how I believed my interview protocols aligned with my theoretical framework to ensure I was aware of my theoretical expectations (see Appendix G, Preliminary Codes). I also used my analytic matrices, tried to generate rival explanations, and noted discrepant data to my overarching themes. I included these within the analytic chapters as they gave me a stronger,

holistic picture of the nuanced, complex variation within the lived experiences of these eight teacher-leaders. Finally, I addressed these threats through immersion in the data, meaning prolonged exposure to the data for half a year, as well as cultivating an ongoing self-awareness through writing memos (Maxwell, 2013).

Limitations

This study had several limitations. First, as is the case in other qualitative studies, the findings from my study were generalizable only to the sample of eight participants (internal generalizability; Maxwell, 2013). My hope was to dive deeply into the lived experiences of eight participants by conducting three 60-90-minute interviews rather than administering a survey to a larger number of participants randomly selected from the population of over 10,500 teachers in Wake County or 3.2 million teachers in the nation (NCES, 2017), which could lead to external generalizability (Maxwell, 2013). Additionally, my primary goal was to examine how this group of teacher-leaders made sense of flourishing and the supports that helped them to do that. While race, class, gender, age, years of experienced, and so on are very important, and while I could have employed theoretical frameworks to understand the influence of these identities better, this was beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, a specific limitation was the whiteness of this study as demographic information was not available and even a purposeful snowballing to find and invite additional diverse participants proved unsuccessful. I was, however, actively open to issues and themes related to these arising from data, as I explain in Chapter IV.

Another limitation was the variety of ways to describe and define concepts such as *flourishing* and *teacher leaders*, and in this study, I defined them in narrower ways which assisted me in analysis, but also limited my findings to this sample and this study. Additional limitations were due to the scarce resources of time and money within a doctoral program

because, with more of both, I would have been able to extend this study to a larger group of participants and collect multiple forms of data (e.g., through focus groups). For this first phase, however, I sought to understand the phenomenon as particular to teacher-leaders in Wake County public high schools.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation research study of eight teacher leaders in Wake County public high schools explored how, if at all, they flourish by inviting them to participate in in-depth interviews and document collection to tell their stories. As the researcher, I did my best to honor their voices and their stories of flourishing, or not flourishing, by both listening attentively and pursuing the rigorous methods of data collection and analysis to understand the influences that help, or perhaps hinder, the ability of these leaders to live, teach, and lead well.

Chapter IV

INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter, I present the context of the state of North Carolina and the district of Wake County Public Schools. I also describe the eight teacher-leader participants in this study in brief chronological narrative summaries, which are adapted narrative profiles (Seidman, 2013), or vignettes from the participants' words, contextualized in chronological form with my own interpretations (Miles et al., 2014) to give background and context for each individual's lived experience. By chronological summaries, I mean that I point out key transitions in the participants' career: Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow, Becoming a Teacher, Becoming National Board Certified and a Teacher-Leader, and Teaching and Leading Today. These chronological categories align with the interviews I conducted and the research that shows these are important career transitions (Behrstock-Sherratt, Bassett, Olson, & Jacques, 2014).

As a brief reminder, the questions for this study were to learn how, if at all, these eight teacher-leaders in Wake County Public Schools describe and understand flourishing in their careers. As my interview protocols and original methodology showed, I also explored a second and third research question regarding the encouragers and obstacles these teacher-leaders described and understood relative to how, if at all, they flourish. Due to the fullness of data from participants in response to the first research question, I decided to focus the findings chapters on the first question about how, if at all, they flourish, with specific attention to three distinct times

in their careers (i.e. the first 3 years, as they earned their National Board Certification, and most recently). Therefore, the subsequent chapters will offer findings related to how, if at all, these teacher-leaders experienced passion, purpose, and practical wisdom in their flourishing. This chapter, however, is an introduction to the individual participants. I base these descriptive and interpretive narrative summaries on my analysis and interpretation of each participant's meaning making from three in-depth, semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Seidman, 2013).

As for the organization of this chapter, I first offer an overview of the participants, followed by individual, chronological narrative summaries which are adapted narrative profiles (Seidman, 2013), or vignettes from the participants' words, contextualized in chronological form with my own interpretations (Miles et al., 2014) of each participant. In the remaining chapters, Chapter V, VI, VII, and VIII, I present my analysis and interpretations of how these eight participants described and understood how they flourished throughout their careers, with specific attention to their beginning years of teaching (Years 1-3), their earning of their National Board Certification (> Year 4), and in the most recent academic year (2017-2018).

Ultimately, the eight individuals who participated in this study teach at five different high schools out of the possible 29 high schools in the district of Wake County. These five high schools, as the school settings for the eight participants, vary by student demographics, location, and performance, which I detailed in Chapter III. The next section introduces the eight participants who went to school and currently teach within this highly political context of North Carolina.

The Eight Participants

In this section, I briefly give a summary of the participants. Next, I offer narrative summaries of the individuals which are adapted narrative profiles (Seidman, 2013), or vignettes

in the participants' words, contextualized in chronological form with my own interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). All the names I used are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants to the best of my ability. I also gave their schools pseudonyms and used vague descriptors for the teachers and the schools' identifiers. These vignettes are separated chronologically by key transitions in the participants' career: Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow, Becoming a Teacher, Becoming National Board Certified and a Teacher-Leader, and Teaching and Leading Today.

Overview of Participants

As an overview, the eight participants in this study varied in experience from 10 to over 25 years of teaching and came from all different parts of the state. Interestingly, most participants went to either University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill or North Carolina State for their undergraduate degree, and almost all had taught in surrounding districts of Durham Public Schools, Guilford Public Schools, or Chapel Hill-Carrboro Public Schools during their beginning years of teaching ($n = 7$). Almost all of them ($n = 6$) have been the Teacher of the Year in their schools as well. Importantly, all participants taught in North Carolina for the majority ($n = 2$), if not the entirety, of their career ($n = 6$). One participant, Molly, taught in another state due to her husband's graduate school admission before returning to North Carolina; a second participant, Danielle, taught abroad her first year. Seven of the eight participants also earned master's degrees in North Carolina before or within their first few years teaching. Two of the teachers, Alice and Ella, teach at Lakewood High School (pseudonym) and three teachers, Molly, Patricia, and Chris, work at Riverdale High School (pseudonym). Importantly, a fourth teacher, Saul, originally taught Riverdale High School, but moved to a new school (Castle View High) the year of our interviews. The other two teachers taught at other schools in the same district, so the

participants in the study taught at five different public high schools within a 29-school district. In terms of diversity, the sample included two male participants, two first-generation college graduates, a participant who identified as a lesbian, and multiple different content areas of the teachers. As mentioned, once I noticed that the race/ethnicity of all my participants were White, I changed my sampling strategy to a combination of snowball method with the intention of “purposeful maximal sampling” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 75) to try to include a racial/ethnic diversity of experiences that may exist within the group and provide the richest information for this study. I addressed this choice in more detail in both Chapters I and III. To my dismay, the limitations of time and money did not permit this strategy to work as it might have with more time.

Table 10 summarizes the participants’ demographic information. For each participant, I created an interpretive epithet to capture the essence of the participants in terms of the values or qualities they carry with them as a teacher, based on my own interpretation of their words and their personality in the time I spent with them. I chose to do this both due to my own literary background as an English major and because I found overarching themes in how they described themselves as teachers. Also, I explain these epithets in detail and in the participants’ words within each narrative summary. I also list each participant’s gender, race/ethnicity, approximate years of experience, school (pseudonym), and the content area in which they teach.

In the next section, I offer a detailed narrative summary of each participant using chronological signifiers. Again, by chronological summaries, I mean that I point out key transitions in the participants’ career: Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow, Becoming a Teacher, Becoming National Board Certified and a Teacher-Leader, and Teaching and Leading Today.

Table 10

Final Eight Participants

Pseudonym	Epithet	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Approx. Years of Experience	Pseudonym School	Content Area
Molly	The Mother of Extremes	Female	White	20	Riverdale	Math
Alice	The Audacious Actress/Advocate	Female	White	25	Lakewood	English
Danielle	The Defender of Intellect	Female	White	10	Green Forrest	ESL
Saul	The Steady Problem Solver	Male	White	20	Castle View	English
Ella	The Ethical Edutainer/Activist	Female	White	25	Lakewood	Humanities
Leigh	The Leader of Learning	Female	White	15	Blue Valley	English
Patricia	The Perseverant Pedagogue	Female	White	15	Riverdale	Math
Chris	The Crusader for Kids	Male	White	10	Riverdale	Math

Participant Narrative Summaries

In this section, I introduce the participants through my adaption of Seidman's (2013) narrative summaries. These are adapted narrative profiles (Seidman, 2013), or vignettes in the participants' words, contextualized in chronological form with my own interpretations (Miles et al., 2014). The quotes are direct, so I do my best to maintain the participants' original language; however, I do add my voice, as the researcher, to offer context and interpretation. Unlike the narrative profiles, which are written purely in the personal "I" (Seidman, 2013), I offer chronological vignettes to show the participants' life history. The goal of this chapter is to give readers a reference and a picture of who these participants are as individuals before offering cross-case analysis and findings in Chapters V, VI, and VII.

I separated the chronological summaries by key transitions in their career: Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow, Becoming a Teacher, Becoming National Board Certified and a

Teacher-Leader, and Teaching and Leading Today. These chronological categories align with the interviews I conducted and the research that showed these are important career transitions (Behrstock-Sherratt et al., 2014). In summary, I intertwined the language from the participants with my own interpretations to give a context to these individual teacher-leaders who flourished throughout their careers.

Molly—The Mother of Extremes

Molly, White, female, and mother of two children, has been teaching math for almost 20 years. As the chronological progression shows, Molly has given everything she has to her own kids and her students. I call her “The Mother of Extremes” because she is always thinking about how to “benefit” her “children,” as she said:

Molly: I kind of feel like now I’m about to hit, I guess this is technically the 20-year mark, and now I’m like “Okay, what’s going to be different now?” And that’s something I really want to think about . . . just doing something different for the benefit of my children.

RESEARCHER: DO YOU MEAN YOUR STUDENTS OR YOUR CHILDREN?

Molly: Students, yeah, see. . . . They’re all my kids, not just the ones that I gave birth to.

She sees all of her students as her own; she also teaches the “extremes.” By this, I mean that she has always taught the highest-level and lowest-level students. As she said, “I had a wide range of kids from lower-ability levels up to I think it was an honors Algebra 2 class. . . . And, you know, I think that was probably the start of who I was going to be because I’m what I called ‘the extreme teacher.’” Molly treats all her kids who show up as if they are her own, or as she stated, “It doesn’t matter who shows up in my room. I just teach kids.” The following chronology shows how Molly first entered teaching through the NCTF program and then highlights the specific points in her career based on my first research question: the beginning years (Years 1-3), earning the National Board (> Year 4), and in the most recent academic year (2016-2017), which I call Teaching and Leading Today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, in this subsection of the narrative summary, I explain the process of Molly earning a spot in the NCTF program, through which she committed to being a teacher for at least 4 years. Molly has always wanted to be a teacher or, in her words, “it was just there.” Remembering her childhood, she explained, “I would line up my stuffed animals, my baby dolls, because I was playing school at a very young age.” When she got to high school, she “applied for every scholarship under the sun.” While she did not receive the Teaching Fellows scholarship at her first-choice university, she “wrote a letter” and said:

If a spot will become available, I would like to be considered. Well, the mail came one day and I had a letter saying, ‘There’s a spot available. Would you like it?’ So my parents called, I was like, ‘[Jubilant sound].’

NCTF was one of many extracurricular activities Molly participated in throughout college, but the program exposed her to a few activities outside of her comfort zone, or as she recalled:

A lot of people were doing what’s called an Outward Bound. And I was like, ‘Okay, that sounds cool, but I don’t think I’m made for that.’ But I thought it was kind of neat, and so I did. I lived in a teepee for a week.

She remembered how these non-teaching-related experiences helped her become more “well-rounded” before becoming a teacher.

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Molly for a career in teaching, the next point of Molly’s career that I describe is her process of becoming a teacher, for which I asked her specifically about entering the profession and her first several years as a teacher. For Molly, as if déjà-vu from high school, she did not get a teaching job right away and was not the first choice of the school that hired her. She said:

I wasn’t their first choice but I was second choice. I thought. I can do this. I used to run into people who were like, “You’re teaching at Durham? . . . Do they bring their guns to school?” They had this horrible reputation, like, “Don’t ever . . . why would you ever

teach in Durham?” But it was just a regular school to me, and I was like, “I just teach kids.”

For Molly, her first 3 years of teaching were in the early 1990s, and she felt she was able to “devote [her] life” to teaching and her colleagues were “like family.” She said, “I don’t really remember it being a struggle. I think I put a lot of time into it.” She described her routine:

I get up every morning, I drive, I teach, I come home. I try to watch a little TV while he’s [her husband was] trying to study and I’m grading papers, I’m planning lessons, I’m planning three weeks in advance. We have no money. I can’t go do anything. It was like there was nothing else to do. So that’s what I devoted my life to.

As she explained, Molly’s life revolved around teaching from the beginning, especially while her husband was in school. For her, she “devoted her life to” school and teaching, so the struggles many list about their first years of teaching did not stand out to her. In fact, she remembered how her principal “looked after her young teachers.”

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important data point is the transition for Molly to earn National Board Certification. For her, if any struggles were apparent during her first years of teaching, Molly remembered some struggle “being an outsider” when she moved to a new school out-of-state for a few years while her husband finished graduate school. In contrast, she explained that she “really struggled that first go-round” of earning her National Boards. She had returned to Durham and her mentor and Department Chair, Jane (pseudonym) who “was a good friend,” said to her, “Come on, do it with us.” Importantly, Molly described that she was “thankful that [Jane] did make [her] do it before [she] had children.” She recounted how earning her NBCT status impacted her:

I think that [the National Board Certification] also showed me that I needed to do more as a teacher, not just go to the classroom every day and teach my kids but to have an impact on teachers outside of my school, outside of my district. So I think that kind of led me also . . . you know, in addition to [Jane—her department chair] giving me the push and the shove to start doing the workshops.

After she earned her National Boards and taught for one more year, Molly stepped away from the classroom to take care of her children. She was one of two participants who left teaching, albeit temporarily. She left around her fifth year but not because she wanted to leave. Instead, she explained the trials of leaving teaching, leaving the school she loved with Jane, and returning to the classroom:

[When my second child] was born, we couldn't afford double daycare, so I took the year off and pretty much that year I was just a mom, or at least for the first part of it . . . but [Jane] called me and I committed to doing some workshops. So I would travel, and observe their teachers, give them feedback, and kind of spend a day with them.

As she explained, Molly based her professional decisions on her kids and her family, both at home and at school. When she came back, she moved to a new school closer to her family and described:

I felt like an outsider. I actually considered leaving Riverdale [pseudonym] that year because I was so unhappy. But they [the administration] did make some changes, moved me to another building near people that would be nice to me and supportive. And kind of once I got back to that family environment, I've been much happier.

She preferred the “family environment” with her colleagues and her students, and finding a place that felt more supportive, specifically with administration, pushed her to renew her boards during her tenth renewal year.

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe the last data point relative to my first research question, which is teaching within this last academic year (2016-2017). As a brief reminder, I described Molly as *The Mother of Extremes* due to her experience teaching all students, yet teaching low-level students has taken its toll on Molly as she reflected upon this last year of teaching.

I was to the point of quitting this year, which of course I wasn't going to quit but just I couldn't handle my fourth block anymore, and it took me saying, ‘If you want me to come back, I have to have some support.’ I think also they [the administration] were like, “Oh, she's a better teacher. She's going to be fine.” But definitely it would be great to

have more support and more encouragement from administration, but the little bits you do get are very fulfilling—the thank you from a parent, the occasional thank you from a child.

In my perception, Molly framed her experiences with somewhat extreme language when she spoke of getting to the “point of quitting,” but in the same way even the smallest “little bits” of support and encouragement she received were “fulfilling” for her as a teacher.

Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate

So I’m very much an advocate. Every time I see that now happening in my students . . . and it’s everything—we did a seminar the last day before school let out and I’m talking to the girls about leaning in, you make yourself big physically, all this kind of stuff, and to the boys like you don’t let somebody’s voice not be heard. So here it is twenty-five . . . nine years later and things paid off somewhere.

Alice is a White, female English teacher with over 25 years of experience, and as the direct quote revealed, she cares tremendously for the well-being of her students and is an advocate for them both in the classroom and in preparation for their life beyond. In the following chronological narrative summary, I show how her epithet, The Audacious Actress/ Advocate, captures her talent “to play a role” combined with her passion to care for who her students become. In the next sections of the narrative summary I highlight her becoming an NCTF, a teacher, an NBCT, and a teacher-leader today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, I explain the process of Alice earning a spot in the NCTF program, through which she committed to being a teacher for at least 4 years. Alice, unlike Molly, did not dream of being a teacher, or as she told the story—instead—as she thought of teaching as playing “a role” to get out of her hometown:

I was 18 years old, stupid and in a stupid boyfriend-girlfriend relationship that was borderline emotionally abusive, and he thought a female’s role was, “You’re supposed to be a teacher. You’re supposed to be quiet.” . . . And I fell for that spiel and I was a good student. I knew how to play the role. I’m very good at acting, whether it’s in front of the classroom or in front of somebody else or you know, whatever, to get me through to a certain point. So I knew if I could just play this role until graduation I could be out of this

role. If that makes sense? So that's a horrible reason to be a teacher, but I applied for Teaching Fellows and I got it, which is really crappy that I probably took that scholarship from somebody who really wanted to be a teacher and who perhaps was more qualified, but then I guess as they say things work out the way they're supposed to and I got and I loved it.

Alice experienced an emotionally challenging relationship where her boyfriend somewhat bullied her into thinking she could only be a teacher, so she used the Teaching Fellows as a pathway *to* college and *out* of the relationship. She was, in fact, in one of the first cohorts of Teaching Fellows' existence, and while she originally felt like it took a bit of "acting" to get into the classroom, she ended up "loving it." For example, she described how the NCTF program, specifically the excursion she got to choose on her own, allowed her to explore the outdoors in a canoe, but she ended up doing more than paddle and bang beaver dams. In the following excerpt, Alice explained how this experience provided a space for her to step outside herself:

After sophomore year when you got to pick an experience, I picked something completely outside my comfort zone, I went camping in Lake Mattamuskeet and Alligator River for 10 days. I still look at that . . . I cannot believe it. It was like we were this canoe, and your role when you got to a beaver dam was you had to take your paddle and bang the beaver dam to get all the snakes off, and you had to crawl in the beaver dam and pull the canoe over. There's no way in the world I would do that now, but you're nineteen years old. I went from being this prim and proper structured girl to where I didn't wear shoes for a year of college. . . . I was becoming everything that I was told I could not be.

For Alice, this was the opportunity to do something "completely" different that she still "cannot believe" nearly transformed her into a new person or, in her words, "everything that [she] was told [she] could not be." The entire opportunity of becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow was not just a way to go to college or become a teacher, but also to find herself.

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Alice for a career in teaching, the next point of her career was becoming a teacher. I asked her specifically about entering the profession and her first several years as a teacher. Through student teaching, Alice shared that

she learned more about herself and her willingness to “try new things” even when she “failed miserably.” By college graduation, her confidence in herself grew and she explained that she could not decide whether to go home “and show that [she’s] somebody different and that I’m better than what those people knew [her] as” or “escape and just do something different.”

Because her grandmother was diagnosed with cancer at the same time, she decided to teach at her old high school close to home and “show [them] that I am not the meek, mild-mannered loser that I was in high school.” As soon as Alice returned to her old high school, she realized the “demographics had changed.” In fact, a lot changed, including administration, but Alice “enjoyed” it because she “felt like what [she] knew was a little different so it wasn’t like stepping right back in.” Although she had little support and “no mentorship” and felt like an “absolute failure” when she started, she won her school’s First-Year Teacher of the Year award.

Overall, she remembered how much it “was a struggle” and recalled:

I started with very little self-confidence, very low maturity, very little professional intelligence. . . . But obviously, a lot of room for growth, and I realized that pretty much you do damn well anything I want to. I survived crappy boyfriend. I survived crappy jobs and some crappy situations. I can pretty much get through anything. I faked my way through situations with old boyfriend. I faked my way through being a teacher those first couple of years when I did not know what I was doing, but I could put on a good act, to where I feel like now that’s very much what I do in the classroom. Not necessarily faking it, but I’m good at acting.

Alice conveyed that she had “a sense of success” because she got “past it and survived that year,” which made her feel good about herself. Plus, she said, in the tougher moments, she might think, “I want to walk away from it, but the fact that I didn’t because I knew, ‘I have to get through this, I have to pay off these four years,’ the fact that I got through it made me more invested.” Additionally, as a self-claimed actor, Alice could advocate for herself and buy time until she reached belief in her own abilities as a teacher.

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important point is the transition for Alice to earn National Board Certification. After teaching in her hometown, Alice moved to a nontraditional school to “save the world” before the federal funding for it ran out. Alice was the second teacher who left teaching, but only for a few months while she was looking for a traditional public school job. At her new school, she heard about the National Boards from the “common work area” and thought, “Well, clearly it is taking up every moment of their existence.” In response, she “figured there was no way that [she] could do that and have children,” so she and a few of her friends decided to do it the very next year. She remembered that they would set aside time on their calendars and hold each other accountable, which was “beneficial in terms of creating that community and support system.” While she passed her first time, the renewal process was a different story:

Even though it was a truncated version of what I had been through before . . . the second time around was a real struggle. I just felt at a loss. It exhausted me. It made me question, “If this is supposed to be the highest level of what it means to be a teacher in the United States, this is crappy,” and it made me question the validity of the whole thing. . . . And then when I did pass, I look back on that and wonder maybe it was a crutch. I don’t know.

Alice reflected that her time was more stretched and the pressure to pass felt more challenging. “Maybe it was from just the tiredness of raising kids and just general life, but I don’t know that it was necessarily the boards that were harder as much as it was me being weaker,” she explained. This was also a time of major transition at her school. She and a few core teachers, she realized, had “more clout and power at the school than the administration.” Therefore, simultaneous to proving herself as an educator for the National Boards, she and her colleagues “were figuring out how to go through backdoor channels to try to infiltrate the way [new principal] was taking down the school.” The new principal, she described, was not cutting it, so she and her colleagues spent their time “trying to make more leaders within the school, trying to keep young people and trying

to develop the [school] culture.” The principal did eventually leave, and she has outstayed a few more principals since.

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe Alice’s overall experiences within the last data point relative to my first research question, which is teaching in this last academic year (2016-2017). With over 25 years of experience, Alice is a veteran teacher. In reflecting on this last year academic year, she thought of her leadership as “behind the scenes” and “not necessarily a title next to [her] name like PLT leader, though that may be the case.” Instead, she enjoyed helping teachers “one-on-one like going down the hall and saying to the new teacher, ‘Hey, look, I saw you having a conversation in the hallway with a kid, do you need help with that?’” She also took on a student teacher for the first time in 25 years. “I just think the way I teach is somewhat engaging and I don’t think that’s necessarily something that requires professional development,” she explained. So it seems it did not occur to her that a new teacher would want to learn from her. While she said “it was fabulous” to have a student-teacher, Alice also shared that her focus this year was on her own kids and helping them transition into high school and middle school. While describing teaching today, she said:

I tell the kids, ‘Teaching sucks right now.’ . . . So, I think I feed off when I see kids doing their work. That makes me feel like, ‘Wow, [Alice] , you’re forty-seven, you’ve been doing this twenty-five years, and you are still in engaging and you’re still relating to the kids’ and I ask them to do something and they’re not putting their head down and they are doing what you asked and they are having a conversation and they’re getting involved and they’re still surprising with what they can accomplish. So that I think in turn feeds me that I must be still doing something a little right and that’s why I think I have not thrown me out yet.

In addition to the school not throwing Alice out, she said she is not willing “to quit” either, despite the parts that are pretty “crappy.” She explained, “While I’m not willing to be so uncomfortable as to quit my teaching job, I liked to be uncomfortable in the classroom.” In some ways, Alice has grown into her role as a teacher by acting the part until it became a real part of

her. Unlike Alice, Donna, Participant 3, figured out that teaching was the best route for her in high school.

Danielle—The Defender of Intellect

I'm here to say that teaching is probably the most intellectually stimulating thing to do. I mean, on a basic level, as an English teacher, ESL, my students, they'll bring all their other homework for me to help them with at lunch. . . .but then on a much deeper level just figuring out psychologically what's motivating this person? If she made a mistake, why did she make that mistake? Like all the way back to, "What conclusion can you draw?" just like figuring that out is exhilarating for me, and it's still like that.

Danielle is in her early 30s and identified as a White female and ESL teacher with just over 10 years of experience. As her quote conveyed, she was "exhilarated" by the intellect it takes to teach her ESL students as it goes beyond just the practice of teaching English. I interpreted her story as one that epitomizes the intellect it takes to be a teacher and a leader. To be specific, I highlight her becoming an NCTF, a teacher, an NBCT, and a teacher-leader today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, in this subsection I explain the process of Danielle deciding to be a teacher and earning a spot in the NCTF program, through which she committed to being a teacher for at least 4 years. To begin, Danielle's reference to "What conclusion can you draw" harkened back to her first experience with a student who was a second-language learner when Danielle herself was in high school. She saw her classmate drawing something like a picture on a test, and Donna explained, "It floored me that there could be a way to interpret this question to 'draw a conclusion' . . ." so differently. In fact, Danielle found herself "jealous of people who were bilingual," so she decided to learn Spanish—knowing the increasing number of immigrants in the South were Hispanic. Because she wanted to major in Spanish, she realized the obvious job opportunity for her would be to become a teacher, so the NCTF was "relatively low-risk" and she thought the idea of "starting off college debt-free sounded great."

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Danielle for a career in teaching, the next point of her career is her process of becoming a teacher. I asked her specifically about entering the profession and her first several years as a teacher. Danielle graduated “speaking [Spanish] somewhat okay, but yeah, [she] wanted to be immersed with this. So that was [her] main goal.” As a result, Danielle “deferred Teaching Fellows for one year and [she] went and taught in the Dominican Republic.” Despite of her training, she remembered, “I was so terrible,” and even after returning to the States to teach, “it was a big challenge because [she] never felt like [she] knew what [she] was doing at either school.” Like many specialist teachers, Danielle had to teach ESL at two different schools in a district neighboring Wake County. Even when she was able to teach at one school the following year, she said,

I had zero free time. I don’t even know how I managed to spend that much time on [teaching] . . . but just so much time trying to figure out how to present information so that they can get it and engage.

Danielle reflected that she’s “gotten more efficient these days,” but partially because she spent “so much time” on her lessons when she started.

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important data point for my dissertation is the transition for Danielle to earn National Board Certification, which I describe in her words in this section. In the midst of finishing her third year, she saw teachers in her school accomplish the National Board Process. She explained:

They went through the process and so that inspired, encouraged me to do it. So I did it. This was my fourth year teaching. I spent a lot of time on it and I did not pass the first time. And my second year that I resubmitted when I was in Wake County, and so I think I made a bad choice the first year to not work with other people on it or not to get help or confer with anyone about it. But Wake has . . . they have a full-time person dedicated to it.

Danielle described how hard she took the first “failure” and that it “sucked,” but that the mentor she met “read [her] first entries” and described how she needed to make a few changes.

Reflecting back, Danielle said, “I had a lot more fun with [the resubmission] because I felt more confident that I was doing it correctly, and I passed.” Danielle continued to work in the district and the same school where she passed her boards and earned opportunities “to write curriculum.” In reflection, all her lesson planning work from her first few years “paid off.” Plus, she kept in touch with the ESL teacher who helped her with her Boards to this day.

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe Danielle’s overall experiences as the last data point relative to my first research question—teaching within this last academic year (2016-2017). Now, Danielle is the “department chair” and “works with student services” to build schedules for her ESL students. On top of these leadership activities and curriculum writing, she also led a “Safe Zone training” this past fall at her school that provides “equity training” for working with students who identify as LGBTQ. She identifies as lesbian and found that the training “made [her] feel like [she] was contributing to the community . . . gave [her] confidence.” It also gave her a sense of community as she said, “Those colleagues really stimulate me, and make me feel like ‘Okay, there’s a team here, and we can do something.’” By “something,” Donna specifically meant making school a “safer” place for students who are different, whether because of the language they speak or their sexual orientation. As a teacher, she also found that:

This past year for me personally was a great because it was my second year teaching all the classes I taught. So I was able to draw on a couple of things I had created and push it a lot further. Especially in the case of the class that I co-teach with an English teacher, we’re able to draw up even more content material.

Always creating new lessons, Danielle was “stimulated” when she saw “some fruits” of her hard work and would only leave teaching if she felt “isolated.” Co-teaching gave her the opportunity to expand her ideas and become a “problem solver” to help the kids in her classes—much like Saul, whom I describe next.

Saul—The Steady Problem Solver

My dream is that I can continue to help revolutionize public education. . . . I would want to be remembered as the one who was always searching for the answer to a problem that we didn't know existed yet.

Saul, a White male, has almost 20 years of experience teaching English and specializing in technology integration for his classroom. As the quote about his dream revealed, Saul has always found it important to solve problems and be ahead of the pack for his students, which is why I gave him the epithet “The Steady Problem Solver.” In the following subsections, I describe his trajectory to becoming a flourishing teacher-leader by becoming an NCTF, a teacher, an NBCT, and a teacher-leader today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, I explain the process of Saul deciding to become a teacher, earning a spot in the NCTF program, and committing to being a teacher for at least 4 years. One of the first problems Saul faced was paying for college because he was the “first person in [his] family to go to college, away to college, and do that experience.” Saul explained:

But what [I] recognized is there wasn't money for that unless I made a way for myself, so I looked into Teaching Fellows because I loved teaching and I wanted to do that, I guess. And that was a great opportunity and I decided basically to go to the farthest school away from where I grew up. I had a visit to [University] and just there were seven or eight other people who were just really gung-ho about teaching and they had some folks there who actually had done their student teaching or were doing their student teaching at the time, they had professors, they had newbies like me, and all of those experiences I didn't feel like I was being hoodwinked about what teaching really meant.

As a senior in high school and self-claimed “farm-boy,” Saul found people on the opposite side of the state who “like [him]” were “gung-ho about teaching,” and he felt a sense of belonging with the NCTF.

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Saul for a career in teaching, the next point of Saul's career is his process of becoming a teacher in which I asked him

specifically about entering the profession and his first several years as a teacher. Despite his love of teaching, Saul remembered that in his first year, he “was surviving” as a teacher. He offered details that the experience was “difficult” because with “five classes . . . 113 or 114 students,” he struggled “fitting everything in to a standard that [he] wanted it to meet.” Owning his “A-type personality,” Saul “would not stop until [he had] reached that standard. And it’s unreasonable at times, and I actually do work myself into several ulcers, yeah.” Saul’s experience teaching to meet his own personal standards led him to the hospital where he:

recognize[ed] that if I didn’t change the way I interacted with work, I was going to literally kill myself. I couldn’t do that, right? And so I redefined how hard I was going to work. I work differently. I let some things take longer than they would have before, trying to find a healthier balance with school. I did not [consider leaving]. I think it was because I had many commitments to the Teaching Fellows that for four years I had signed on that I would see it through.

Saul’s commitment to himself and his students helped him “redefine” a balance after working himself into the hospital with ulcers in those first years of teaching. For him, the trial was a problem to solve rather than a sign to leave the classroom, as he explained: “I did not consider leaving” because he had made a “commitment.”

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important data point for my dissertation is the transition for Saul to earn National Board Certification. Not only did Saul survive those first years of teaching, but “by the fourth year, [he] loved it.” To clarify, he described, “I liked it a lot in the first three, but I loved it after the fourth one. I actually didn’t consider doing anything else after that.” Based on learning how to do the “administrative things,” he began to “enjoy” what he was doing, so he thought “[earning National Board Certification] was a natural progression because I knew that I wanted to stay in the classroom, and at that point the governor’s office was paying for getting it initially, so I thought it was a good opportunity.”

Taking advantage of the growth opportunity did not work out the way he anticipated, or as he said:

I did not pass the first time. I was shocked. When something comes easy for you and you think you're okay and you're like, "Oh, okay, that's cool. I think I'm fine," but then you don't pass, you have to become really self-reflective. The second time around I did that by myself, so it was really a solitary experience because honestly, I was trying to recover from having failed. But once you kind of get past that part, it's really a growth experience and it became a whole lot easier to actually engage what I needed to do, which was look inward and identify where I wasn't meeting standards, where I was making mistakes, and what level of influence I could exert on the learning situation and student outcomes.

While Danielle and Saul were two of the three participants who did not pass their first time, Saul reflected internally on why he did not pass the boards his first time and "became really self-reflective." He not only "recovered" and figured out how to pass the boards his second time, but also he started implementing a "flipped model" in his classroom as the result of his learning. To him, the "sky's the limit, right?" and he explained:

[he] gets some space in [his] world and day job starts being less overwhelming, [he] finds a way to make it more efficient. So the part about flipping my classroom was about I still had some students who weren't performing, so it was my job to figure out why, right? It was a problem to be solved that some of my students were still not being successful. As a professional, your job is to figure out why.

A flipped model implements digital learning spaces for content delivery and allows the classroom to be a collaborative space. Saul explained how the Boards helped him to reconsider how to "influence" students "who weren't performing." As Saul noted, the students were at the center of his problem-solving.

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe Saul's experiences during the last data point relative to my first research question, which was teaching in this last academic year (2016-2017). Saul found creative ways to solve his problem of not reaching every student through a "flipped classroom," which led to a "model that worked extremely well." After all this

hard work, he met a dilemma with an assistant principal who created an environment in which he “could not continue to grow.” So, he found a blended high school that was a “hard transition” but he “recognized that [he] can’t get students to the place and empower them to master all the objectives” if he does it the old way. Saul is a leader in that he “support[s] a new high school model for [the] district and possibly the state as well.” He explained that he’s “grown in ways this past year that [he had] never considered before.” To him, “It’s a lot of fun, it’s exciting, and it makes me want to get up and go to work every day,” which he confirmed, is “pretty cool.”

Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist

Well, I mean, at some point you have an ethical relationship with students. That’s the most important thing, which is that we’ve all had that teacher. . . . So every day you have to stand before some kids and be a role model. So that’s what gets you through because you can’t let them down. . . . A lot of kids, teachers are the only adult role models that they have that consistent, calm and show them every day what adulting looks like. So the stakes are pretty high for those kids and we can’t let them down. So that’s the bottom line.

Ella is a White, female, Humanities teacher who has won countless accolades for her teaching and service over the last 25 years. I selected this opening quote as she directly revealed how an ethical relationship is being a “role model” and her “bottom line” is being an adult who sees life in terms of moral “high stakes.” In the subsequent sections, I explain how Ella grew from focusing on her own teaching as an edutainer (Johnson & McElroy, 2010) to an activist—thus my epithet for her: “The Ethical Edutainer/Activist.” In the next sections, I highlight her becoming an NCTF, a teacher, an NBCT, and a teacher-leader today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, in this subsection I explain the process of Ella deciding to become a teacher, earning a spot in the NCTF program, and committing to being a teacher for at least 4 years. Ella’s passion for teaching was palpable, but she owned that she “did not originally want to be a teacher.” Instead:

I wanted to be a lawyer mainly because people seemed to identify that I was fairly passionate and articulate, and I had a hard time reconciling though how being a lawyer was actually going to help the world and I also wanted to help the world, very much an idealist.

As she was looking at colleges, Ella did her own research and realized she would “have to take out a lot of loans to go to law school, which meant I wasn’t going to be able to do public defense or anything particularly world-improving.” This led her to pursue the newly cemented Teaching Fellows as a way to fund her college experience. Ella explained:

I started looking at my teachers in my classroom and realizing how much I admired them and how very smart and capable they were, and I felt, “Well, sure, I can do that for four years and then I’ll go be a lawyer.”

Ella’s long-term planning evidenced her dedication to an ethical, “world-improving” life and she settled on the classroom as phase one of her plan.

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Ella for a career in teaching, the next point of her career that I describe is her process of becoming a teacher. I asked her specifically about entering the profession and her first several years as a teacher. Ella’s immediate reaction to entering the teaching force was “Oh, oh my gosh, the first year. [Sighs] Terrible,” even though she won her school and district’s award for First-Year Teacher of the Year award. While she admitted that she did “offer a lot of creativity to common planning,” she said there was a disconnect between “appearances and reality.” Specifically, she captured a day-in-the-life:

I was also coaching, cheerleading, three full seasons. I would honestly sometimes be planning my third-period law and justice class during the second period, and let me tell you, when you’re at that point you are alone and naked in the woods. You don’t have handouts. You have nothing. It’s like trying to build a fire with one stick. [Laughs] Good luck. Nobody seemed to pick up on what a fraud the whole thing was. That’s the scariest part about that first year.

While Ella remembered feeling like she was “alone and naked in the woods” most of her first years of teaching, she also had the contrasting perspective that “[she] just couldn’t imagine how [she] could be doing anything wrong because [she] was working so hard.” Her discovery of all she was doing wrong came next when she pursued her National Board Certification.

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important data point for my dissertation is the transition for Ella to earn National Board Certification. Ella not only wrote her master’s thesis on the National Board Certification, but also found it to be “a really quality process” for her. She admitted, too, “the pay was huge.” When she signed up to earn her Boards, she explained that “[She] didn’t know it, but [she would go] through a divorce that year.” In the midst of this personal transition, she also reached an epiphany in her teaching:

Suddenly, the National Boards really didn’t give a hoot what I was doing. They wanted to know what the kids were doing and how I knew they were doing it, and then how I knew how they were growing and how I could document that, and I just had not been teaching that way. So it became a real challenge.

For Ella, the Boards gave her an opportunity to alter her teaching for her entire career trajectory, and “that was a big pivot in [her] understanding of teaching and learning.” This made her renewal process much easier, at least relative to her teaching, because she had “straightened out some of [her] approaches to teaching by then. [Chuckles].” In fact, she explained:

When you’re teaching well and you’re really planning well and assessing well, you really feel like, “Damn, I just pulled off a freaking orchestra,” you know? Like, “The horns came in at just the right time and that little thing right there was really good.” And so that’s just really fun to kind of reminisce about sometimes.

The renewal process provided a space for her to realize she was doing a good job and, yet, she was still “super-stressed about it. And you know, there’s a lot riding on it. I couldn’t afford a 12% pay cut. We had become financially dependent upon that money. So it suddenly felt really

scary.” Though it was a very different process, she appreciated how she felt she was “in the spirit” of the best teaching and learning possible.

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe Ella’s experiences overall during last data point relative to my first research question, which was teaching in this last academic year (2016-2017). Over time, Ella realized her passion for leading her students and fellow teachers moved beyond the classroom and the school, which surprisingly “is not recognized within the school building because it’s related to policy at a statewide level.” In 2013, Ella started a nonprofit to promote education and teacher voice in light of the policy changes that negatively impacted public schools. She explained:

What’s really frustrating about that is a lot of teachers seem to know that we need to be somehow informed and active on the state level or policy level, but they don’t have the bandwidth or the time or the interest or even necessarily the understanding of how the government works to do that work themselves. So what I find is a lot of like, “Gosh, Ella, we’re so glad we have you. You can be our representative.”

Her willingness to protest, to go to state legislature meetings and conduct trainings for other activist are applauded by her peers, but “unfortunately, what that means is that a lot of [her] leadership just isn’t recognized on a teacher evaluation instrument.” Even though she had spent most of her career doing “a lot of things at the school level in terms of leading professional development workshops or being on the school improvement team,” she saw the changes were more “systemic.” In response, Ella described her teaching and leading as no longer just “plugging holes that need to be plugged.” This required her to work on “a different level” that not only brought about more awareness from her colleagues, but also a documentary about her work.

Ultimately, while Ella showed that changing policies are of utmost importance to her. Her most outstanding commitment is to her current and former students to the point that she holds weekly pancake breakfasts on Saturdays to keep in touch and celebrate her students as they

too grow into ethical adults. She explained that they have been “the brightest most supportive spots of the semester,” and it is yet another creative way Ella has worked to “build supportive and sustaining relationships” within and beyond the classroom.

Leigh—The Leader of Learning

I think I have established the relationships but I know that there’s so many more kids out there that I need to reach and that I need to continue being my best so that I can reach them. I think there’s some more that I can do as a teacher, that I can stretch myself even more.

Leigh is a White female English teacher who has taught for almost 15 years in Wake County. As she explained, “being [her] best” for her students was of the utmost important to her. I chose the epithet “The Leader of Learning” because Leigh discussed often how she needs to be a “teacher first” for her students. To be specific, in the next sections of the narrative summary, I highlight Leigh’s becoming an NCTF, a teacher, an NBCT, and a teacher-leader today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, in this subsection I explain the process of Leigh deciding to become a teacher, earning a spot in the NCTF program and committing to being a teacher for at least 4 years. Leigh explained that her journey to becoming a teacher only took a couple extra detours. The first was her desire to “be a pediatrician,” until she “saw blood . . . and I went, “Nope, can’t do this.” The second was in high school when she took a Teaching Cadet class and realized, “Yup. This is where I’m meant to be. This is where I’m supposed to be.” She was so convinced that she even told the panel during her final NCTF interview that “I will be a teacher whether or not I’m awarded this scholarship. Clearly, I want it, but that’s not going to change my mind.” From her memory, one of the best parts of being a NCTF was just knowing there was “somebody in close proximity to you who would understand education classes” and her experiences “student teaching.”

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Leigh for a career in teaching, the next point of her career that I describe is her process of becoming a teacher, for which I asked her specifically about entering the profession and her first several years as a teacher.

Interestingly, although part of the original mission of NCTF was to avoid a teaching-shortage crisis, by 2004 when Leigh graduated, she explained how “it was hard as an English teacher.”

She explained that she “was worried” and wondered, “Is there going to be a job for me?” For her first year of teaching, she felt lucky to have a job, even though she explained:

I had all-year-long academic classes. I had three in the fall and three in the spring. I mean, I don't . . . I never really got good vibes from one of the department chairs; it was co-department-chairs. One of them really liked me, the other one I never got. And the other one helped me out a lot and she eventually confided, she said, ‘Well, you were kind of given this load because we wanted to see if you could handle it.’

Leigh realized the English department chairs’ objective was “to dump this and try and chase me off”; because of interdepartmental politics, her first years were not easy. She described how one of the biggest struggles with her classes was that she “didn’t feel like [she] could reach some of those kids,” which made her “feel like a failure.” The fact that she also had her “tires slashed” days before her one of her other students stabbed another student just across the street did not help her feel any more connected either. She described this feeling “until second semester [when she] had a lot better relationships.” Changing her behavior, she reflected, “I showed up. I started going to the spring events . . .” and she realized that as a teacher that it was important because:

It makes the whole experience better for you because students see you, they see that you care about your job, they see you care about them. So that was a big kind of eye-opening experience for me.

Leigh explained that now if she has a challenging group of students, she thinks to herself, “Okay, you got through a whole year of academic freshman. You can get through one semester. . . . You can do this.”

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important data point for my dissertation is the transition for Leigh to earn National Board Certification. As soon as she was done with graduate school, which Leigh completed during her first years of teaching, she sought new ways to grow, or as she said:

Well, you know, as a teacher you're always, and just personally for personal growth, you're always trying to figure out, "Well . . . I'll do the real reasons first of all," [chuckles] you know, looking for a way to increase salary, obviously, but always just looking for a way . . . I had finished up grad school, . . . somebody had told me, . . . "Okay, as soon as you're done with grad school, just go right in that next year, do national boards so you'll still have that reflection, kind of writing in your head."

Before starting her Boards, she thought to herself, "I've got four years of teaching. I've got a master's degree. I know everything. I am awesome," although Leigh admitted that "there was a certain arrogance" when she was thinking, "Whatever, I can do this. I don't need anybody. I can knock this out." She learned her lesson when she did not pass "by six points." The summer after she submitted her Boards, Leigh had already been looking to change schools and took an opportunity to become "a literacy coach." Through her work, she met someone who "led workshops" and, as explained to Leigh, she "had to talk about how specifically your accomplishments related to students." After passing the Boards on her second effort and with the help of the "Wake County Coach," Leigh recalled:

I think when I looked back, I think that really was when I started to see the importance of reflecting, because again I was doing it for national boards but it really . . . I took more of it to heart I think when I was doing national boards, so I think that was when I realized, "Okay, this is something that is good for me as a teacher. I need to continue to do this and look back and think about it."

As Leigh claimed originally, she "always" looking for "personal growth" and she will make it a point to "go to those meetings" when she renews in a few years.

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe Leigh's overall experiences during the last data point relative to my first research question, which is teaching in this last

academic year (2016-2017). To give context to this last year, however, it is important to note that Leigh was only a literacy coach for a short while before she went to a new school where she is now the department chair, as she described:

Being a teacher leader, I think that that's been a great experience for me because I've been able to branch out and meet teachers in other departments at our school-wide department chair meetings and I've been able to see and hear and bring that back to my department and everything. And that's . . . I've enjoyed getting to hear how other department teachers, or department leaders, how they kind of help focus things in their department. I've enjoyed that.

Leigh has been “a mentor” for new teachers and the “newspaper adviser . . . NHS adviser” and explained that it was “really a lot” in addition to being the department chair. Recently, she decided to give them up as her parents, who were both teachers and her father an administrator, warned her: “Are you going to continue to do all this? Because you're going to burn yourself out.” And [Leigh] said, “You're right. No, I'm definitely not.” With the increase in leadership, Leigh “was just bringing even more work home” and realized:

I felt myself . . . I mean, I just . . . I couldn't . . . I was just . . . I felt that I couldn't devote as much of time to my students that was needed and that they deserved. Just because I had other extra duties as adviser. That was when I went, “No, I need to be . . . I'm a teacher first, and then these others come second.”

For Leigh, it is most important that she is a teacher “first” for her students and the other roles come second so as not to “burn [herself] out.” Although she technically did leave teaching to become a literacy coach, Leigh's stories in the interviews always centered on her students:

But it is, it is making relationships, helping them learn, I know I've talked a lot about them and not necessarily as much about English, but helping them learn to appreciate a book. . . . if I can get them reading a book—one of my crazies, bless him, I fought with an assistant principal on this, she put him in my speech class this semester. I went, “After I had a whole semester?” She said, “Well, he wants to be in your class.” I'm like, “Oh, of course he does, after he gave me so much grief.” And she put him back in my class, I'm like, “Oh boy.” But it's a different environment. He doesn't have ten of his friends in class this semester. He came up to me at the end of today and said he's going to miss me. I gave them ten minutes of free reading four days a week. He's finished his second book for me.

Leigh's eyes beamed as she expressed her excitement and continued to share how it "was a very good way for me to end the day, a very good way."

Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue

I think a lot of times when people talk about teacher leaders they oftentimes focus on the things that happen outside of the classroom, but I think that for the ones that are really the cream of the crop it starts in their classroom and the leadership opportunities happen because of that. And I think that is a large piece that is often overlooked, is the strength of what you do within your classroom, and it's not just about the list of roles that you have.

Patricia is a White female who has been teaching Math for just about 15 years. Her mom was a teacher and Patricia "loved playing school." She also learned very quickly she was "really good at explaining things to other people and just grew from there." She claimed very early, "I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher," and the subsequent sections show how Patricia's focus in her teaching, specifically her own pedagogical excellence, is and has always been her focus as a classroom teacher. I explain her career trajectory in the next sections of the narrative summary, and highlight her becoming an NCTF, a teacher, an NBCT, and a teacher-leader today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, in this subsection I explain the process of Patricia deciding to become a teacher, earning a spot in the NCTF program, and committing to being a teacher for at least 4 years. Patricia had "a really great honors geometry teacher" who inspired her and was a NCTF. As valedictorian, Patricia had a few different scholarships to choose from, and she was glad she chose NCTF because it "just gave [her] more exposure . . . more opportunities to be in classrooms, to get to meet with teachers . . . beyond the standard education preparation." Overall, she reflected that the entire experience felt like they were "groomed to be leaders . . . and to know that we had the tools to be successful in the classroom." The exposure, for Patricia, also came through the rigorous classes she experienced in her subject area and teaching "all academic classes" when she student taught.

She remembered, “it was good for me to be out of my comfort zone . . . those kids were awesome. I still keep in touch with a few of them.” Recalling that “we didn’t feel like we were alone” stood out to Patricia from her college experience, which was cut short because she graduated early.

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Patricia for a career in teaching, the next point of her career is her process of becoming a teacher, for which I asked her specifically about entering the profession and her first several years as a teacher. In 2003, when Patricia started teaching, North Carolina was still supporting teachers in multiple ways through “paying for your boards” and “getting your step on the pay scale.” The state also paid for her master’s degree. This all happened within her first several years of teaching, and Patricia recalled how her main objective at this time was to return to her home county in Eastern North Carolina. She remembered, “The job was pretty awesome,” and even though she had been told she would teach low-level classes, she ended up teaching higher-level classes. For her, this was motivation “to just do a really, really, really good job, and I did.” Being close in age to her students and having intimate familiarity with their context, she said she has maintained relationships with up to “50% of the kids I taught there” and was “really happy.”

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important data point for my dissertation is the transition for Patricia to earn National Board Certification. Before starting her board, Patricia moved to Wake County. She explained, “Leaving [her original school] was very, very hard. . . . I was at the point where the kids that were freshmen were going to be seniors,” but she left because she and her husband wanted to buy a house near all their friends. For her, she explained, “I was going to do it as soon as I was eligible” and it would be “a 12% pay raise.” Overall, she described the process was “very reflective” and “detailed,” so the

hardest part was “keeping it to the twelve pages or less” because she wanted to be as specific as possible. With absolute clarity she also conveyed, “I enjoyed it. I felt like I learned a lot . . .”

Specifically, the video-portion stood out to her:

And you know, a lot of times you only realize all the things kids do until you video them and you get the opportunity to watch some of that. . . . They didn’t always know when the camera was on them, so a lot of times the conversations that were videoed were very natural because, again, they didn’t know that they were being videoed. And so just kind of seeing really and hearing students I think was the biggest takeaway and I think it made me always be more conscientious about . . . the listening ear whether they know it or not based on what they’re saying.

Patricia’s emphasis on her students’ reception to her teaching through their “conversations” and “what they’re saying” showed how she is conscientious in approaching new curricula like the shift to the Common Core.

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe Patricia’s experiences relative to last data point in my first research question, which is teaching in this last academic year (2016-2017). The shift to the Common Core in math over the last few years influenced how Patricia described her teaching today. She explained, “We were not properly trained . . . and this is the third version of those standards, and we’re getting a fourth version next year.” While Patricia admitted that this caused “terrible confusion” for teachers, she was most concerned with the “missing pieces and holes” that existed in students’ understanding when they reach her for higher-level math. This was not just because of the changing curriculum, but she mentioned that her school specifically has experienced “a lot of teacher turnover and in math, math is one of the areas in particular where there’s large turnover.” She claimed that her work specifically has been to “push back against the challenge of the changing standards and being as consistent as possible” to help new teachers and her students. As she claimed, “I feel successful in different ways whether it is content delivery to students, helping students get math credits in college. . . . I

feel accomplished and I hope that continues.” Patricia cared tremendously about her own perseverance and that of her colleagues, which was why she agreed to take on a new lead mentor role the following year to help new teachers adapt to the profession she loves.

Chris—The Crusader for Kids

I think success, as a teacher, is that you positively impacted kids’ view of content or like confidence in themselves and provided them a means to find intrinsic motivation to be like a productive member of society.

Chris is a White male in his tenth year of teaching who cares deeply about his students and thought “teaching is awesome” despite the struggles and his staunch refusal to be a teacher as a kid. Growing up in a family of teachers, teaching “wasn’t really on my radar because I thought it would be cool to not do what my parents did.” As the subsequent subsections show, Chris’s care for helping his students in the classroom, the pitch, and beyond graduation was a core value of his teaching and leading. To be specific, I next highlight his becoming an NCTF, a teacher, an NBCT, and a teacher-leader today.

Becoming a North Carolina Teaching Fellow. As previously noted, in this subsection I explain the process of Chris deciding to become a teacher, earning a spot in the NCFT program, and committing to being a teacher for at least 4 years. First, Chris reflected on his own relationships with teachers as a high school student and realized, “I just liked them and they were key in me figuring out what my world view was, if it’s possible to have a world view as a junior in high school.” When he heard about NCTF:

At first it was just kind of like, “I’ll apply for this and see what happens,” but then I really got pretty into it as I started kind of considering, “What if I actually did become a teacher?” So I would say the number one inspiration was people that were awesome at the job that were involved in my life pretty directly.

Chris remembered NCTF’s access to knowledge and the “informative” nature of all the experiences such as the Discovery Bus Tour. This stood out to him because he could learn about

“different parts of the state and what school systems look like in those areas,” and he “actually still keep[s] in touch with a couple people . . . professional contacts, which has been cool.” For Chris, NCTF was a nudge that turned into a career commitment to the teaching profession.

Becoming a teacher. While the NCTF program prepared Chris for a career in teaching, the next point of Chris’s career that I describe is his process of becoming a teacher, for which I asked him specifically about entering the profession and his first several years as a teacher. As an aspiring teacher, Chris made the critical decision to be a math teacher as a “strictly business decision” to “market” himself to have more leverage in choosing where he would end up teaching. Similarly, he attended a free graduate program directly after college to gain a “different perspective on teacher prep before [he] jumped in.” Knowing full well he wanted to teach in Wake County partially due to the “best salary” and having good friends in the area, he became a high school math teacher to pay back NCTF. As he recalled:

It was really hard to be a teacher, but I mean I don’t feel that it was some unusual struggle. I feel like I still have the same struggles that I had as a first-year teacher. Now, I also worked enormously long hours and I don’t do that anymore because I now have a family, and so it’s different in that component. I mean, there were nights I coached my first year, which was probably ill-advised. So I spent an enormous amount of time at school but I was really into it, so it was fine. I wanted to be good at my job.

Chris taught and coached his first year, and he won the First-Year Teacher of the Year award for the district. Teaching was challenging, he explained, “But I don’t feel like the struggle as a first year is that different than the struggle as a tenth year teacher.” What he remembered about his first years was his “connection” to students, or as he explained:

I feel like it was connection . . . like the relationships and connections with students I think was where I hopefully stood out. I think that’s hard to do, is to figure out how to relate to kids when you’re twenty-two yourself and you’re in charge of a group of students and you’re responsible for their behavior and their learning and you’re really not that mature even then.

While his connection with the students stood out to him, Chris did not remember the specific struggles of teaching other than “walking that fine line” of balancing being a “friend” and a “teacher.”

Becoming National Board Certified and a teacher-leader. The next important data point for my dissertation is the transition for Chris to earn National Board Certification. Due to the recommendation of his administration, Chris made earning his National Boards a priority in his fifth year of teaching. He explained, “I actually kept it a secret from all my colleagues that I was going to go through the process.” As a naturally private person, he described that he “just didn’t really want people in [his] business.” Chris’s devotion to teaching is unquestionable, so his approach to the Boards certification was methodical and free of stress. As he said, “It was pretty cool to think critically about what I was doing in the classroom and to analyze what students were turning in.” Similar to the other Math teacher, Chris also found the videos to help him the most when he reviewed his own teaching. He reflected:

I think I’ve always been sensitive to trying to give kids the most equitable environment as possible. So I know we all have implicit biases about kids, so I try to provide the exact same opportunities to learn and the same access for all kids. So for that reason, I distinctly remember my videos where like an honors class and then like a really remedial class because I wanted to be able to see like, “How do I change in these two environments that are very different demographically?” So I made it a point in my instruction in the videos to make sure that I wasn’t treating kids differently.

As a Crusader for Kids, Chris ensures all his students have access to the best he can give, and he explained that the Boards was a “turbo burst” for his career or “kind of felt like that, like it’s a nice little burst of energy, yeah, kind of ramping up the speed on the treadmill a little bit for a short time” rather than “burdensome.”

Teaching and leading today. In this section, I describe Chris’s experiences throughout the last data point relative to my first research question, which was teaching in this last academic

year (2016-2017). Similar to other teachers listed, Chris has taken on multiple formal and informal roles. “Informally, I think I am just a go-to person for other teachers to ask questions about things they don’t feel comfortable asking administration,” he said. Also, he described a few recent transitions from formal to informal roles such as:

The last three years I was school improvement chair. I formally resigned from that position at the end of last school year, but that means informally I’m going to be like the, “Hey, how did you navigate this tricky situation?” or “What would you do if . . . ?” Like I’ve already had a couple of informal meetings with people that are still on the team about like, “What do you think about like doing this, that and the other?”

In addition to this “informal” role to help the school improvement team, Chris has been integral to “changing the model of how we teach our most remedial kids.” With the administration and other teachers, they agreed to start a new system and “lab” for students, “so [Chris is] going to be the leader of figuring out what the heck we teach and what we do and how we help kids get out of the revolving door of sucking at math.” In addition to his passion for innovating programs for student, he admitted:

I feel like it’s really tough to be a teacher right now. Last year was tough for me, and everybody probably. You know, all the talk about public education being broken, you know, kids say that too. So, I mean, it’s filtered down to students where they recognize like the public dialogue about kids will in jest make comments about like how broke teachers are or like, why would you be a teacher? Those things aren’t productive for like our citizenry, so that’s kind of annoying and tough.

Overall, Chris explained that “Kids are becoming more and more complicated but yet the resources are dwindling, so it’s just harder to help impact kids in a positive way.” However, he knows “public education is always going to be like a slow-moving frustrating thing, so it’s going to. . . . I consider one step back and two steps forward a successful journey.” Therefore, when I asked Chris if he had anything he wanted to share about him that he thought helped him flourish, he said, “I think I’m really good at connecting with students. I mean, that’s really simple but that makes everything else easier and more fun.”

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to offer a contextual overview of the setting and the participants. Each participant generously offered over 3 hours of his or her time to share personal stories through in-depth interviews. The chronological narrative summaries of each participant in this chapter were meant provide distinguishing stories and portray their individual careers. In the subsequent three chapters, I share findings and explore patterns across context, across case, and within cases for the participants throughout the chronology of their careers as beginning teachers, aspiring leaders, and current teacher-leaders, focusing on the key ways they flourish through passion, purpose, and practical wisdom. The final chapter offers a discussion with the implications of these findings.

Chapter V

FINDINGS: THE GOOD LIFE THROUGH CULTIVATING STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

In this chapter, I discuss the first finding that emerged from this study—that the eight teacher-leader participants in this study described and understood the good life, or their own flourishing, through cultivating relationships with students ($n = 8$). Importantly, all eight teacher-leaders believed they were flourishing, and their own good life was mobilized in *different ways* at the three distinct points in their careers—in the beginning years teaching (1-3 years), in the National Board Certification process (after Year 4), and in the last academic year (2016-2017). Specifically, I learned that they understood their own flourishing as they improved and overcame the struggle of classroom management during their first years ($n = 5$). Then, the process of earning their National Board Certification influenced how they found new meaning in their passion for educating students or teaching *well* ($n = 8$). Finally, in their most recent years of teaching (AY 2016-2017), I learned that all eight teacher-leaders described their own flourishing as intimately tied to their improved ability (i.e., practical wisdom) to create collaborative structures for community with students both within and beyond their classroom ($n = 8$). Overall, I claim that these eight teacher-leaders described and understood the good life of teaching through cultivating relationships with students as it brought them purpose, passion, and practical wisdom in *different ways* over time during their careers ($n = 8$).

As a brief reminder, this chapter partially answers my first research question, which was: How, if at all, do eight National Board Certified NC Teaching Fellows currently serving in secondary public schools in Wake County, North Carolina, describe and understand their own flourishing? For these participants, the three distinct times of their careers were benchmarks for reflection within each of the three interviews.

Chapter Overview

For the organization of this chapter, I used the chronological benchmarks or the three distinct points in these eight teacher-leaders' careers to tell the story of how I understood how the value of cultivating student relationships for them connected to their own flourishing.

In the first section, I discuss the claim that the majority of teacher-leaders ($n = 5$) understood the good life of teaching through their struggle to improve how they *managed* their students' behavior in their classroom in the beginning years (1-3 and even up to Year 4). I then describe the other three teachers, Ella, Chris, and Patricia, who saw improving classroom management as important but secondary to the meaning they derived from relating to students. In fact, they sought more expansive ways to connect with students such as teaching extra classes, coaching, and leading extracurricular activities. Importantly, these three teachers happened to stay at their schools all three of their beginning years. Therefore, in light of this finding and these claims, I explain important contextual factors of the school demographics for these eight teacher leaders during their first 4 years.

In the next section, I discuss the claim that the National Board Certification process influenced all eight teacher-leaders ($n = 8$) through their passion of making an impact on students relative to their learning. Specifically, I discovered that the National Board Certification process helped teachers emphasize their passion for seeing student success and growth through learning

($n = 8$). For five of the teacher-leaders ($n = 5$), this change in purpose was *a transformation* from managing students to realizing their ability to teach *well* with sophisticated lessons. Please note that I use *transform* according to the dictionary definition sense of a marked change (*Oxford Dictionary*, 2018)—not *transform* within the lens of adult development. In contrast, the other three teachers only *shifted* in their purpose to *educating* students with even clearer objectives for student success. In other words, I learned that while all eight teachers understood the reflective process of the National Boards as influential to discovering their passion for engaging with student relationships, five teachers *transformed* their relationships to emphasize influencing student learning, growth, and success within their classroom, while the other three only *shifted* their purpose and emphasis with building student relationships to live the good life.

Finally, in the last section, I explain how these eight teachers described the relationship with students in their most recent year of teaching (AY 2016-2017). More specifically, I describe the claim that these participants ($n = 8$) understood the intentional process of cultivating community within their classroom and beyond, with both current and former students as critical to their good life. In this section, I also claim that where teachers were in their career—early career (around 10-15 years), mid-career (around 20 years), or late-career (over 25 years)—at the time of our interviews altered how they framed their most recent personal relationships with students. For example, I describe how I learned that teachers who were in their early career stage (i.e., 10-15 years of experience) were looking forward to students coming back and sharing their life and successes ($n = 4$, early career). Meanwhile, teachers with about 20 years of experience seemed to experience a momentary disconnect with their current students and cherished the fond memories of former students ($n = 2$, mid-career). Finally, I claim that two teachers with over 25

years of experience epitomized their practical wisdom through their creative ways of cultivating sustainable communities with current and former students ($n = 2$, late career).

Overall, I claim that the purpose and meaning of the student relationships (i.e., *managing*, *educating*, and *community-building*) to these teacher-leaders were not strict categories. Instead, these were overlapping ways that their passion for engaging students and practical wisdom in learning how to build relationships with students emerged as the good life for them.

In the next section, I share the lived experiences of the teachers based on their reflection of student-teacher relationships in the beginning years of teaching in addition to sharing about the school context.

The Beginning Years: The Purpose of Improving Relationships and School Context

In this section, I explain the claim that the eight teacher-leaders in this study described and understood the good life of teaching in their beginning years through the purpose and meaning of their relationships with students. Specifically, they described their own flourishing through the struggle of *managing* student behavior and their improvement of doing this during these first several years in building relationships with students. Five of the teachers articulated classroom management as their primary struggle and area of improvement with student relationships, while the other three listed it as secondary to pursuing additional ways to connect with students.

The Purpose to Improve Relationships: Classroom Management as Struggle or Secondary

The majority of participants in this study described management of their students as their primary struggle in their first 3 years ($n = 5$) and explained that improving their relationships to students was integral to the meaning and purpose they felt as teachers who lived the good life and flourished. In this section, I explain how Molly, a 20-year veteran and Math teacher, saw

management as her “biggest struggle” and had to learn to build “rapport” but found it fulfilling; Leigh, a 15-year English teacher, improved from a “robot” and a “failure” to showing she “cared” for students; and Alice, a 25-year veteran English teacher, named improving how she paced her lessons and classes to meet student needs as part of the struggle and joy. For this claim, I chose Molly, Leigh, and Alice as the best examples and most representative of all five participants to illuminate how the classroom management struggle was integral to their good life.

First, for this section, I will illuminate Molly’s experience, followed by Leigh and Alice before I then describe the other three teachers (Ella, Chris, and Patricia) who saw classroom management and this struggle as secondary to how they understood the good life of teaching through relating to their students.

Classroom Management as Struggle

In this section, I explain my claim that five teachers saw their struggle to manage students as their primary purpose within teaching during their beginning years that guided them to find meaning and live the good life ($n = 5$).

Molly’s management as “fulfilling.” As a first example, I explain how Molly—The Mother of Extremes, reflected on her first year as emphasizing the “rapport” with “my kids” in tandem with management being her “biggest struggle.” She said:

Yeah, I just think the only, probably the biggest struggle, was classroom management, and I feel like a lot of that is just you’re new there, you’re so close in age, here’s this young new chick teaching some of these rough kids and they’re going to test my limits. So that was probably my biggest struggle. I don’t know . . . I don’t really recall how much support I got from administration on those things. I think they’d probably encourage me as I try to reach back that far. But that was probably my biggest thing, which is classroom management. Like, how do I get these kids to do what I want them to? And when you’re that young and that new—but I had to get rapport with my kids.

Molly described the “rough kids” as testing her “limits.” Although she also explained that the support from administration was far from memorable, she remembered this “struggle” as a

crucial part of her first year of teaching. Her takeaway from this “biggest struggle” was not to leave teaching, but instead she thought it was important to get “rapport with my kids.” Molly was one of five teachers who emphasized classroom management, and when I asked her, How did you endure?” she explained:

It was just fulfilling. I kind of saw that as I’ve made the right choice. I do have a purpose. They need me here. I can reach these kids. Nobody else wants to teach these children, and I made those connections with them.

Describing how the students “need [her] there” and explicitly stating her ability to “reach these kids,” I learned that she believed the relationships with students gave her “a purpose.” This was especially important, I discovered, because the perception of her school system was that it was highly violent, or as she explained, people used to ask her, ““You’re teaching at Durham?” . . . “Do they bring their guns to school?”” because “They had this horrible reputation, like, ‘Don’t ever . . . why would you ever teach in Durham?’” Again, she explained that her response would be that she just “teach[es] kids.” Moreover, while they would bring her stories that she was “just not expecting like, ‘My mom beat me last night’,” she reflected that “I feel like that’s what’s awesome because I’m not just there to teach math, that they see me as somebody they can trust and can talk with. It’s very fulfilling.” Molly’s emphasis on trust echoed how the personal purpose or meaning she derived from relating to the students was the “heart of teaching” to her (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835).

Although Molly’s emphasis was on how these relationships were “fulfilling” and assured her, in her words, “that’s where I’m supposed to be,” she also relayed multiple stories where she would have “her eyes out,” unsure of how to handle the students. She explained, “While there were those moments too,” referring to the struggle of feeling like she had not improved her management enough to meet the kids’ needs, she gave an important example with a student who

shocked her with an outrageous comment in class about masturbation. As she explained this “mortifying” moment, she laughed and explained, “We gave him space. Then, we did more math.” To me, Molly highlighted the claim of managing students as a struggle, but a fulfilling struggle for her that made her feel like she was flourishing and living the good life of teaching, especially as she improved her ability to connect with students. To show how other teachers saw their struggle—and improvement—with managing students as fulfilling and part of how they discovered meaning and purpose, I next share the experiences of Leigh and then Alice.

Leigh’s learning to “let them chew gum.” Expressing their difficulties with students in their classroom like Molly, Leigh—The Leading of Learning who taught English for about 15 years, and Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate who taught English for about 25 years, both explained their struggle to manage students in their first years of teaching as a primary struggle, yet also a primary source for meaning. For them, like for Molly, the challenge and work of connecting with students and improving their ability to care for them was intimately connected to how they described and understood the good life.

Leigh, for example, taught her first few years in a school that was highly diverse, yet also had a lot of gang activity. For Leigh, specifically, her first few years were not only a struggle due to her needing to improve her classroom management, but she also expressed that she felt like a “failure.” Her feeling of failure may have been, I think, in part due to her inspiration and vision of teaching from the movies. For example, Leigh explained how she had been “inspire[d]” by the teacher-hero myth (Goldstein, 2015) in films like *Freedom Writers*, which was hard to emulate. In her first year of managing students, Leigh explained that she learned how to modify her own behavior, not just the students’ behavior. In fact, her first year was an evolution of learning to not

just *manage* the students' behavior, but to learn how to do that and also "show them that I care," or as she recalled:

My first year of teaching, within a few days, or excuse me, back-to-back days, my tires got slashed, yeah, tires got slashed, and the next day there was a stabbing across the street and it was my student who had done the stabbing. . . . But the reason my tires got slashed was because I had gone off-campus and as I was going on back on campus I had caught two girls skipping, and so they had slashed my tires in retaliation. Lovely. Lovely expensive . . . lovely expense there. But I did because I couldn't, I felt like I couldn't reach some of those kids. Again, a lot of us go into it and you've got this whole concept of "Oh, *Dangerous Minds*. Oh, *Freedom Writers*. Oh, you know, every single teacher movie out there that inspires you and . . . " And yeah, those are great when you're feeling really low about yourself, but you also have to accept reality too. And you know, I did. I knew first semester there were a few times that I just was kind of like, "I've got to show more. I can't be the robot that I was being. I'm not showing them that I care as much because I am being robotic and, God." I didn't let them chew gum in my class. And again, I know there are still some teachers who do that, but no, no. "Let them chew gum." It's not the end of the world.

Leigh's proclamation of "let them chew gum" showed how she improved from "being robotic" in the first semester, to seeing how her purpose was to "reach" her students. Additionally, as Leigh spoke, I saw how the memory of her students who "slashed" her tires really bothered. To her, it evidenced her struggle and "failure" to connect with the students on a real level. With a bit of exasperation in her voice, Leigh called herself "robotic" and "feeling really low about" herself for not connecting to students the way teachers did in the movies.

For Leigh, and as I learned was true for Molly and Alice as well, the first years of teaching started with the purpose to manage the classroom and student behavior in order to "teach Math" for Molly or "read *Romeo and Juliet*" for Leigh. They quickly learned, though, that engaging with the students in relationships beyond their subject matter or the discipline that they taught was the most important. For example, Molly felt "fulfilled" when she improved her relationships and built "trust" with her students, while the struggle helped Leigh see that she "has

passion and care[s].” Specifically, Leigh explained that teaching “drew out some of [her] better qualities.”

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described this type of struggle as an *optimal experience* when “a person’s body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile” (p. 3). For Leigh, connecting with students who might slash her tires was a challenge she wanted to embrace and accomplish. For example, Leigh told a story of her second semester during her first year of teaching and how she reflected on the ways she needed to change. I learned about how she overcame the struggle to show her students how much she cared and that this was how she saw her teacher life become the good life. She said:

[Teaching] reiterated that I have that passion and care. Like I feel like it drew out some of my better qualities . . . by the second semester I was like, “Okay, I got to show these kids I care or they’re not going to care for me.” . . . and those second semester kids I had a lot better relationships. I showed up, I started going to the sporting events. I mean, I went very early on to one kid’s wrestling match and his mouth dropped open when I walked in. He saw me and waved to me . . . I mean, he would go on to be like a State wrestling champ.

In the quote above, Leigh conveyed an element of practical-wisdom in action here as well, an important thread of flourishing. She showed how she learned she had to “show these kids [she] cares” by showing up, so she “started going to sporting events” and integrating herself into their lives. Her care was abundantly clear, too, as she smiled from ear to ear when she stated that her student had gone on to be a “State wrestling champ.” As a brief reminder, hooks (2010) captured the application of practical wisdom to teaching when she explained it is an “awareness that knowledge rooted in experience shapes what we value and as a consequence how we know what we know as well as how we use what we know” (p. 185). After reflecting on her first semester, I learned from Leigh she had realized that managing the students’ behavior inside the classroom

also meant managing her own behavior towards them inside *and* outside the classroom. In other words, caring happened beyond her own four walls.

As she explained, Leigh later reaped the rewards of her efforts when the student, whom she cheered on in his wrestling match, showed he cared for her as well. The student, Jason (pseudonym), showed that he “got [her]” while she was being observed by her assistant principal:

A couple of weeks later Jason saved me because that department chair who I didn’t think liked me very much got promoted to be an assistant principal and he did the whole . . . because you know how you got two planned observations and then one unplanned. When [the assistant principal] showed up and said . . . he said, “I’m going to observe you,” and I said, “Okay, when?” thinking he’d say in the next couple of days. He was like, “Oh, right now,” and I went, “We’re going to be reading *Romeo and Juliet*. Ugh, that is not an exciting lesson but we need to do it. Oh my gosh.” Well, Jason—again, went on to be the State champion wrestler—I’m reading out the roles and everything and I get to Juliet and Jason raises his hand, and just kind of stood there and I said, “Oh, Jason, you sure?” And he said, “Oh yes, ma’am, I got this.” I said, “All right.” And I figure he’s going to do the, you know, it’s a typical male voice. Oh no, he does a high-pitched voice. When that assistant principal walked out, I walked over and gave him a big hug. And he said, “You know I got you. You know I got you, Miss.” So that was an instance of “Okay, you got to show these kids that you care.”

Leigh’s classroom was not magically better like the movies, as she hoped, yet this one memory with Jason, who stepped up to make her lesson more exciting for her observation, captured a tremendous moment of her first-year teaching. She beamed when she remembered how Jason said, “You know I got you.” In fact, she remembered how the challenge continued to help her learn how to “improve [her] classroom management,” much like an *optimal experience* stretches the limits of mind (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In fact, Leigh explained, again, her focus on improving how she *managed* her classroom enhanced how she connected with students:

I was like, “Okay, I’ve still got tough kids but I’ve figured out how to work through them, how to handle them, how to be . . . how to improve my classroom management. No, I can’t call the kid out in front of his peers. They’re going to come out swinging. Pull them out in the hall. . . . Just again the stuff that you immediately see bad behavior and you address it,” now I say, “Okay, let’s pause. Let’s go outside and talk for a second.”

As Leigh talked about her own growth in her practice of “classroom management,” she evidenced practical wisdom, and how her “authentic field-based practice” (Schussler & Murrell, 2016, p. 281) gave her new insights into how to communicate with students when their actions did not align with her expectations. Learning how to talk to students “outside” the classroom versus “call[ing] the kid out in front of his peers” showed, to me, how intentionally Leigh improved her practice with relating to students. For her, this was a primary purpose in her first years, but her ability to “figure out” how to work “through” the behavior to connect with students was the outcome Leigh, just like Molly and Alice, were struggling to achieve. In fact, Leigh commented on how classroom management “is the hardest to teach” and “until your actual first day—nothing makes sense.”

Again, almost as quickly as she expressed the struggle, Leigh reiterated how she knew, “If I could get through that first year, I can get through anything” and “I’ve realized that, it’s what I was meant to do. It really is. It’s what I believe . . . it’s more than a job. It’s a passion, for sure.” Similar to Molly’s sense of “fulfillment” and “purpose,” Leigh articulated how teaching is “more than a job” but is also “making those connections with students.” For both Molly and Leigh, I saw how managing students for them helped them discover how much building relationships with students and caring for them embodied the concept of teaching as their vocation. For them, the good life of teaching was because of the relationships they built with students, especially because their best relationships were sometimes with students who had caused the most struggle.

Alice’s struggle with “lack of control.” In addition to Molly—The Mother of Extremes, and Leigh—The Leader of Learning, Alice—The Audacious Actor/Advocate, with 25 years of experience, explained to me that it was through her struggle with classroom management in her

beginning years of teaching that she knew this was her purpose and also found “joy” and “excitement” with her students. While Molly taught in tough kids in Durham and Leigh taught at a school with a lot of gang activity, Alice, too, felt like a survivor after learning how to relate to and manage students in a relatively violent school. For instance, she asserted, “I realized that pretty much [I can] do damn well anything I want to,” especially after surviving “some crappy jobs and some crappy situations.” From Alice, I learned how her experience best represented the other five teacher participants in the way she made sense of her struggle with classroom management as integral to her own purpose and self-actualization relative to the good life.

For example, Alice, as evidenced in her words, saw herself as a survivor, not only of a shooting at her school in her first year of teaching, but also of her own naiveté of what it looks like to “change the world” for kids. Similar to Leigh and Molly, Alice taught at a school that was all too familiar with students fighting, or as she remembered:

Five days into my first week, I still remember I’m wearing this beautiful yellow plaid sun dress—spent some of my first paycheck on this beautiful dress—carrying a camera because I’m going to the football game and I’m going to take pictures. It is probably ten minutes before halftime and there are gunshots at the ball game. I remember crawling on the ground in that dress under the bleachers in the dirt—and at that point some people were arrested and the whole thing is scrambling—and running out afterwards with the assistant principal and going home that night and being like, “What in the world?” I was five days into my teaching career. So there were some struggles going on there within the school and that kind of set the tone.

Alice’s first year was not only a struggle due to the violence that surrounded the school, like the gunshots “five days into [her] teaching career,” but also she struggled to adapt to all the changes of her alma mater. As she explained, too, she “had not been exposed to enough, like we’re saying about the class diversity, this is an economic diversity, a race diversity, to where I could relate to a lot of these kids.” Although Alice was teaching in her hometown and at her old

high school, she explained how “this was not the old high school” that she had attended. Alice specifically remembered the “discipline issues” in her classroom:

A lot of my discipline issues came from lack of pacing. So my struggles were becoming frustrated of not feeling that control. I’m fine with being uncomfortable with regard to instruction, but even now I’m not good with discipline, lack of control. So that was where I struggled.

Again, this frustration showed that she was challenged and her original focus on management through “instruction” and “pacing better and transitioning better” made her feel “like a failure, an absolute failure” those first few years. Similar to Leigh, this failure was especially poignant because of her vision of herself: “Here I am, 22, and I’m going to change the world?” Alice added the doubting tone at the end of that statement as a way to qualify and question her old self as a now 25-year veteran.

Still, Alice’s reflections echoed the spirit of hooks’ (2010) “self-responsibility” (p. 185) to cultivate her own practical wisdom. For Alice, her attitude in facing challenging or difficult situations was “I can pretty much get through anything.” In fact, Alice did not give up on “struggling students” and after she left home, she pursued a job at an Alternative School with even more at-risk students. At this new school, again, she experienced violence when someone “held her neck,” thinking she “was his ex-girlfriend” who happened to have the same name. These examples from Alice’s first years of teaching show how she struggled, but also how she quickly added and recalled the “excitement” she felt, specifically when it came to “teaching yearbook,” which I describe in the next subsection on classroom management as secondary.

To summarize, in this section I claimed that five of the eight participants described improvement and wisdom classroom management, with struggle inherent, as the primary *purpose* of their relationships with students and their good life of teaching during the beginning years. I did this by selecting Molly—The Mother of Extremes, Leigh—The Leader of Students,

and Alice—The Audacious Actor/Advocate who, I believe, offered the most comprehensive examples to illuminate the way their struggling relationships with students shed light on their purpose, passion, and practical wisdom—the three threads of flourishing. Despite the struggle, if not because of it, these hard-won relationships brought “fulfillment” (Molly), exemplified their “passion” for caring (Leigh), and acted as the impetus for reflection and cultivating their practical wisdom (Alice). Their experiences best illuminated how the struggle to improve managing student behavior was the primary way they related to students and understood their own fulfillment in the beginning years of teaching.

In the next section, I describe how the other three participants (Patricia, Chris, and Ella) described building relationships with students, not only through improving how they *managed* the classroom, but also through seeking out additional opportunities to work with students. These three participants are different because while I learned that all eight teachers claimed building relationships were important to how they made sense of their good life, especially in the beginning years of teaching, the first five described the struggle to improve their connections with students through managing their behavior. Meanwhile, the other three listed classroom management as secondary to their primary goal of seeking out additional outlets or ways to connect with students.

To do so, I first discuss a unique cross-case participant, Alice. Although Alice listed working on her classroom management as the primary method of improving her relationship to students, she also took on extra responsibilities and found exciting ways to connect with students outside the typical English classroom. In this way, I found Alice to be an interesting participant who fit both claims because, while she emphasized the “struggle” of leading her own classroom, she was also leading the yearbook staff, which brought her additional “excitement.”

Therefore, like Alice who took on the extra responsibility of yearbook, which I describe next, I also convey stories from Patricia, a 15-year Math teacher; Chris, a 10-year Math teacher; and Ella, a 25-year Humanities teacher. Each participant's outreach for additional connections with students evidenced my claim that relationships were integral to how they understood their purpose as teachers and the good life.

Classroom Management as Secondary

In this subsection, I explain the exception to the first claim that classroom *management* was the primary conduit for teachers to find their purpose and build relationships with students in the beginning years of teaching. Instead, within the first 3 years, Alice, Patricia, Chris, and Ella conveyed that flourishing with teacher-student relationships existed outside of the traditional struggle of managing a classroom. First, I describe Alice—as a unique case—and then explain how Patricia, Chris, and Ella's experiences show that their *purpose* in building relationships with students was still primary, even though classroom management for them was secondary. Importantly, after this section, I go into detail about the classroom context of all eight participants. For them, classroom management was secondary, although they still viewed their purpose as connecting with and caring for students.

Alice's discovering a "common goal." First, Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate fit both claims. As I previously explained, she struggled with "discipline" in her classroom, and while she stated explicitly that she "was struggling in yearbook too," she felt more camaraderie with the kids because "the kids were struggling too," or as she said:

So we were all struggling together but we had a common goal, and I did not know how to translate that to the English classroom. So I feel like my joy was often with yearbook and which is probably why when that yearbook job opened up elsewhere I took it and why I stuck with it until 2007.

While Alice stuck with yearbook from 1994 until 2007, she expressed how she found “joy” that first year because they had a common goal, which is often a facet of flourishing communities (Cherkowski & Walker, 2016). She described in greater detail why this particular group of students gave her more joy:

You could just kind of relax a little with those kids. So that was nice. But then, when the books came and because the staff was so small and I knew what I had done, sadly more than I should have. I participated more as a student than as just an adviser. And part of that may have been good because I didn’t know how to do it, so I had to learn what the kids had to do to be able to teach it later. I can say that now. That was not what I was realizing at the time. So I felt very invested in that I had played a role in creating this. So there was excitement in that regard.

For Alice, she felt “invested” in managing the yearbook staff because she had to “participate” with them in their learning. Unlike just focusing on “discipline,” Alice took on the mindset of a student, which shifted her orientation to the struggle. This experience resonates with Conway’s (2012) point that those who flourish do not see their work *primarily* as a struggle. In addition to Alice’s “excitement” with yearbook, I next illustrate how Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue and a 15-year veteran Math teacher explained her connections with students that expanded into an extra class period.

Patricia’s passing on a “planning period.” Similar to Alice, Patricia’s experience showed me how relating to students was her primary purpose. In fact, she gave up her planning period to teach an extra class. Interestingly, I learned from Patricia that she decided to teach in her home district her first year. For her it was simple: “I knew I was going home. That’s where my fiancé was. That’s where my parents were.” Without hesitation, when I asked Patricia about her first 3 years, she emphasized relationships with students as one of the primary joys her first year:

That was where I taught my first three-and-a-half years. So, I mean, it was great. I still keep in touch with I'd say probably fifty percent of the kids that I taught there. I was close to their age, more or less, when I started. But it was, I mean, it was great.

In addition to keeping “in touch” with “probably fifty percent of the kids,” Patricia remembered not “having a planning period for three years” because she agreed to take on an extra math class. She was the only one certified above ninth grade since, in her district, “lots of people at the school couldn't pass the Praxis” for 10-12 Math. For Patricia, classroom management regarding discipline or planning was never mentioned as a struggle, which was true for only her. Instead, she discussed the challenge of teaching multiple classes as something that made her “happy.”

She stated:

Because I didn't have a planning period, they had to pay me for that twenty-five percent of my time. So for the three, four years that I was there, I did that. So that was really nice, I'm not going to lie. And then the flip of that was I pretty much taught the spectrum. So I had the opportunity to teach everything but AP Stats and AP Calc while I was there, which for me was great because it helped make me a better teacher. I taught all the courses, so I knew what they needed in each one along the way.

In describing her schedule, Patricia explained that she was able to “teach the spectrum,” which made her “a better teacher” so she knew what students “needed in each one along the way.” The second benefit to teaching all the courses was, importantly, the relationships. For example, she told the story of one particular student who gave her “challenging behavior”:

There was one. His name was Doug Harrison [pseudonym]. He actually ended up marrying one of my other students who was awesome, and I asked her was she really sure that she really knew what she was doing. But he was just challenging in that his behavior, one day he'd be great and the next day he was just determined that he didn't want to be in there. And when he finally figured out that I wasn't going to send him out, we were fine. Like we had to yell and scream at each other a couple of times, but in the end he made a three on the algebra 1 EOC. He got it done. And after that I didn't teach him again, but I had the kind of relationship that when other teachers struggled I was like, “Doug, dude, like come on now. If you were in my room, think about what would be happening right now.” So it was very tough when I had him in my room, but the continuous work had long-term yields.

While this was a “tough” relationship that evidenced the first-year teacher’s “yell and scream,” Patricia emphasized the “work had long-term yields,” thus showing her perspective that she was determined to connect with him. When I asked her how it was not a struggle to work without a planning period, she explained that she has always been pretty “balanced,” that she “felt prepared” and:

I really connected with the kids. I was the White girl, you know? And most of them were not. And I think that with my age I was a little nervous at first, especially because they gave me an Algebra Two, so I had nineteen-year-olds and I was twenty-one, but something about my personality worked with the kids. And working with them, again, like I said, I still keep in touch with the vast majority of them to this day. I’ve been to weddings and reunions and all of that stuff, and I think a lot of it was just that connection. Something about me clicked with those kids. I got to teach a lot of them more than once, so it was not unusual for me to teach somebody Algebra 1 and geometry or Algebra One and Algebra Two or geometry and Pre-calc, and that helped a lot as well. We all knew what to expect and they knew what to expect of me and vice-versa, so I think that contributed a lot to it.

That “connection” and how Patricia “clicked with those kids” spoke to her overall well-being within her first 3 years of teaching. This was a contrast to the stress described by the participants in this study (Richards, 2012) and in research describing teachers (Robertson & Walker, 2013). In fact, Patricia’s account of her first several years of teaching was not only “really happy” but also aligned with *well-being theory*, which is a construct made up of positive emotion, engagement, positive relationships and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

In her description, Patricia not only “knew what to expect” to teach her students, but also connected with them to the point that she has “been to weddings and reunions” over the last decade due to the positive relationships she formed beyond her normal duties. In fact, similar to the positivity theory of “broaden-and-build” which asserts “widen the array of thoughts and actions called forth (e.g., play, explore), facilitating generativity” (Fredrickson, 2009, p. 678),

Patricia passed her own well-being and generativity onto her students. Even though Patricia, like Leigh, Molly, and Alice, did not have the upper-middle-class suburban kids, which research has shown that tend to help teachers be most satisfied (Klassen et al., 2010; Xia et al., 2015), these teachers conveyed that they saw the struggle as a personal challenge rather than a reason for dissatisfaction. As Patricia explained, her positivity or “optimism” helped the students too:

I certainly didn’t have the best kids given the number of them that I’ve seen in mug shots and sorts of things over the years. But I think I just always felt like that they could do it. I think that that was just, and maybe that radiated from me to them and they felt optimistic as well, but I think I never just didn’t feel optimistic.

Patricia’s perspective of optimism, sometimes called in quantitative research *academic optimism*, (Hoy, Hoy, & Kurz, 2008; Ngidi, 2012; Peterson & Chang, 2003) is the one of the strongest examples of a teacher who *flourished* in her beginning years. This is because, as she has explained, she felt “connected,” even though she “didn’t have the best kids” in terms of behavior or discipline—as evidenced by their “mug shots.” Her engagement with them was so powerful, she even described how it “radiated.” In the end, she said, “my motivation [was] to just really do a really, really, really good job” for her students.

Chris’s “walking that fine line” to coach and connect. Echoing Patricia’s experience, Chris—The Crusader for Kids and a math teacher with 10 years of experience, and Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist and a Humanities teacher with 25 years of experience, agreed to coach during their first 3 years of teaching, thus pushing for additional ways to relate to students beyond the classroom. They explained that the “struggle” for them was not managing their relationship with students but managing their time, which I explain more in Chapter VII. While they both listed that the time they invested was not “sustainable,” the relationships were exceedingly important. It may be no surprise that both Chris and Ella, in addition to Alice whom I mentioned earlier, won their school’s First-Year Teacher of the Year award. This award comes

from nominations from colleagues and specifically the mentor teachers and Mentor Chairs. Usually, the entire staff votes and a few rounds of extra observations are included to discern the finalists.

Thinking back, Chris explained to me, “I feel like relationships with students, whether they struggle or not, has always been what I am best at.” For example, when he described his first-year coaching JV soccer and teaching, he explained:

I feel like it was connection . . . like the relationships and connections with students I think was where I hopefully stood out. I think that’s hard to do, is to figure out how to relate to kids when you’re twenty-two yourself and you’re in charge of a group of students and you’re responsible for their behavior and their learning and you’re really not that much older than them, and sometimes they view you as like a less of a stern individual because of your age and maybe want to treat you as a little more of a friend and less of a teacher. So that’s a struggle and figuring out how to do that but I think that’s one of my biggest strengths in the job, is I guess walking that fine line.

Even though Chris tangentially mentioned “being in charge” and “responsible for their behavior” to show his own resonance with the claim that classroom *management* was the foundational purpose of the teacher-student relationships, he “doesn’t remember it being an abnormal struggle.” In fact, he explained that his “first three years, getting a positive note from a kid you coach, [that said] ‘Hey, really appreciate all you’ve done for this kid. He’s had a great time playing soccer. He’s gotten better.’ Those things are awesome.” Over and over, Chris said, “I loved what I was doing . . . I just don’t think what I was doing was sustainable over a whole career, but I was incredibly happy my first three years.” This is one of the ways Chris and Patricia stood out in their self-described sense of *well-being* in their first 3 years (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) since they both used the words “happy” to describe their teaching rather than the words synonymous with “failure,” as Alice and Leigh did. Again, from Chris and Patricia, I learned that classroom management was still important to their purpose in the classroom, but that they saw it as a secondary purpose to their relating to students.

Ella's taking back the bathrooms with her students. Interestingly, the last participant who is important to understand for this second claim is Ella because she not only took on coaching as an extracurricular activity, but also led the students in mini-school movements as extra pathways for connecting and relating to students in her beginning years of teaching.

Importantly, Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist and a 25-year veteran teacher, did not recall coaching as fondly as Chris did. In fact, she said, “I look back on it and I just can’t believe I did it for five years.” She explained how coaching cheerleading “three seasons” took up all of her time, and although her mentor teacher told her “not to do it,” she did it anyway. Ella’s excuse, I learned, was her fear of the athletic director: “The athletic director, he was like seven-foot-one and really scary, and I would have to tell him and I didn’t want to tell him that I was not good at coaching or that I hated it and it’s taking all my time.” Instead, I discovered from Ella that though the coaching was difficult, she still sought and created pathways for herself to become more involved with students and invigorate her own flourishing. Even though Ella described herself as “clueless” in the classroom and offered the visual of her first year being like “slashing through the jungle with my ax,” she also explained, “I had a sense I was doing good work, and it was what I was supposed to be doing.” To me, this captured the essence of the good life for Ella—and in essence, for all eight participants who listed their relationships with students as integral to their flourishing—in that she felt she was doing good work and “what [she] was supposed to be doing,” which was her best for her students.

Ella explained that one of the highlights occurred when she helped the students start a movement called “Take Back Our Bathrooms” due to the increase of smoking in the bathrooms. She recalled:

I started off that year with a social change movement called Take Back Our Bathrooms. The students wanted . . . there were smokers in the bathrooms and they were

really upset about it. So I thought it'd be a really good idea to lead a passive resistance movement and offer . . . have kids trained to go into the bathrooms and ask their friends to stop smoking in the bathrooms and offer them candy or temporary tattoos.

Ella's self-proclaimed "enthusiasm" for the students gave her the energy to lead a "social change movement," and she trained them to have difficult conversations while coaching and while also claiming "Oh, in the first three years. Oh, Lord. I mean, the whole thing was a struggle." Again, Ella reflected that the entirety of her beginning years was "a struggle," and I explain more aspects of this struggle in Chapter VII as it was apparent for seven of the eight participants ($n = 7$) during their first year, with Patricia as the exception. Overall, I learned that all eight participants put their purpose and passion for relating to their students at the very center of their work and this, to them, made all the difference. For them, struggling for their students in an effort to relate to them, I claim, was integral to the good life.

In conclusion, even for the three teachers who won First-Year Teacher of the Year—Ella, Chris, and Alice—the classroom management struggle was inherent to the first 3 years of teaching, yet when they stated they were "happy," "rewarded," "fulfilled," and "invested," it was because of their teacher-student relationships.

In the next section, I highlight the school context of all eight teachers during these first 3 years of teaching because research has shown that it may be important to how students do, or do not, relate to their students and experience job satisfaction.

The School Context

In this section, I show how school context revealed a few patterns that I claim were an important backdrop to understanding how and why relationships with students—not just school context or conditions—were vitally important to their good life for these eight participants. In fact, I claim that the "humanistic component" (Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015, p. 4), whether

connection with students or seeking connection with family and friends, was always the important contextual factor to these eight teachers. For example, I claim that the duration of *staying* at a school for a longer period of time and the conditions of the external factors (i.e., access to friends, family, and lifestyle) were more important in how they influenced these teachers' good life rather than the *within*-school context or working conditions.

While research has typically shown that school contexts with high diversity and low socioeconomic status produces lower teacher job satisfaction (Klassen et al., 2010; Xia et al., 2015), I learned of four patterns from my participants that the research has not mentioned relative to school context. These patterns all anchor in my first claim that the teacher participants in this study saw their primary purpose as relating to and cultivating relationships with students. Therefore, when these teachers left their schools, if they did, I claim that it had *nothing* to do with their students' population/demographics or the poor environment within their school. To be clear, only three teacher participants did teach in and eventually leave "high diversity and low socioeconomic status schools," and yet they claimed that they cherished those schools and only left for personal reasons like moving closer to family and the like.

In addition, I found the following patterns relative to school context for these participants:

1. all teachers wanted to teach in diverse schools (n = 8);
2. three of the five teachers who highlighted struggle as primary did leave their school after 3 years but because of personal (friends, family, and lifestyle) reasons rather than professional reasons (n = 3);
3. two teachers who highlighted struggle with classroom management had to change schools multiple times due to external factors (e.g., the flux of federal funding for

ESL impacted Danielle and Molly's husband's work required her to move out of state for 2 years);

4. the three teachers who explained classroom management as secondary (and who propelled themselves into leadership within the school and within their first years) all happened to stay at the same school for at least 3 years (and two of them, Chris and Ella, have stayed at the same school their entire career).

Although research has claimed working conditions or school context are strong predictors of turnover (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Perda, 2013), the participants showed me that inverse factors may be true. In other words, the traditional view is that teachers leave poor schools—mostly rural schools in North Carolina—due to the poor working conditions *within* the school. This widely-held belief is much like the traditional economic view that people move *to the city* because cities have more jobs, which pay better, and so on. Florida (2014), however, insisted on the inverse and believed that the national trends of the creative class (i.e., teachers, professors, artists, etc.) move to the cities because of lifestyle opportunities (i.e., culture, parks, etc.) rather than economic benefits. Similarly, I contend that these teachers *had* to leave poorer school contexts because of their personal and lifestyle desires rather than the *within-school* cultures.

Additionally, the lived experience of the eight participants in this study supported research that discussed this personal and humanistic calling as the driving force rather than the poor school contexts. That is, “teachers often enter schools because of the ‘humanistic component’ to teaching in long underserved communities (Achinstein, Ogawa, Sexton, & Freitas, 2010, p. 71; Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Kraft, Papay, Charner-Laird, Johnson, Ng & Reinhorn, 2013)” (Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015, p. 4). This *humanistic* perspective applied to

all the teachers in this study ($n = 8$), specifically several ($n = 4$) who stated explicitly they wanted their first jobs to be with “diverse” (Chris) student-body population. Plus, two of the teachers returned to their home districts as well ($n = 2$), which were poorer, working-class towns.

It is also worth noting that part of the mission of NCTF, as I stated in Chapter II, was to bring highly-qualified teachers to low-income areas (Cohen, 2015). While seven of the eight teachers did work in low-income or high-poverty schools during their first years of teaching (including Danielle who worked in the Dominican Republic and then in Durham), Ella was the exception who worked in a middle-income school. With laughter, she explained how she ended up at Lakewood, the middle- to high-socioeconomic status school, despite her best intentions to teach at a highly diverse and low-socioeconomic status school:

I applied to forty different school systems in North Carolina. And this really is interesting to me because I got two callbacks. So one criticism of the Teaching Fellows program is that the Teaching Fellows didn’t go into high-poverty rural schools. Well, this Teaching Fellow was dying to go save the world in a rural school and got one interview in Rocky Mount, and they looked at me and said, “You won’t stay here. That’s a really nice suit you have on and you won’t stay here.” And they did not hire me. And so then I got interviewed at Lakewood High School [pseudonym] in Wake County where I teach now, and after a while they offered me the position and I’ve been there ever since.

Here, Ella described how she “was dying to go save the world in a rural school,” and while she ended up in the highest-paying district, her long career (approximately 25 years) ended up being entirely in the same district and the same school. Chris is the only other teacher—like her—who was at the same school his entire career (10 years). Their schools, however, vary from upper-middle class (Ella) to diverse, despite both teachers saying they would ideally teach in the hard-to-teach areas that the Teaching Fellows program wanted and that teachers desired.

With this in mind, I use Table 11 to convey the school context by district and school demographics of each participant over 4 years as either racially/ethnically diverse (or not) and through socioeconomic status as low, middle, and high of the first 3-4 years of teaching for each

participant. Again, I show this to contrast my findings with research that shows “Teacher Churning” (the title of the article) or high movement for new teachers is four times more likely with underserved populations, as in high-poverty/low-socioeconomic status and high-minority (Atteberry, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2016).

In the table, I show that six of the eight teachers stayed at the same school for their first 3 years (Ella, Chris, and Saul). Then, I show how Danielle, the ESL teacher, had to change every year, which she attributed to the volatility of funding for ESL being federally funded. Next, I show how Molly had to change for family reasons and go out of state for her husband’s law school, yet she still sought a diverse population. Then, I show how Patricia, Alice, and Leigh moved around their third and fourth years, which they all attributed to better *living* opportunities in Wake County (i.e., close to family and friends). Saul followed them to Wake County a year later. Again, one insight was that the three teachers were better managers or listed classroom management as secondary and did stay at the same school for more than 3 years (as Ella, Chris, and Patricia did for their first 3 years).

In Table 11, I show the participants in the left column, and then by each year show the district, the socioeconomic status, and the diversity status of the school. The final column shows whether or not the theme of *management* was present for them. Again, I show the various contexts for the participants and the variety of combinations of demographics, yet a common thread of low-income or low socioeconomic status schools. Therefore, I claim that these participants’ experiences were contrary to the claim that poorer schools or more diverse student demographics were an important characteristic regarding turnover (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Perda, 2013; Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015; Sutchter et al., 2016; Torres, 2014). Instead, these eight participants identified how their relationships with students, especially in schools

where they stayed for more than 3 years, helped them feel fulfilled even in challenging “rural” or “urban” schools that are notorious for turnover.

Table 11

Context for Beginning Years

Participant	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Struggle for Management Present?
Ella	Wake County Diverse/High	Same	Same	Same	No
Chris	Wake County Diverse/Low	Same	Same	Same	No
Saul	Guilford County Diverse/Low	Same	Same	Same (Last year then moved to Wake County)	Yes
Danielle	Dominican Republic NA	Chapel Hill-Carrboro Diverse/High	Durham County Diverse/Low	Wake County Diverse/Middle	Yes
Molly	Durham County Diverse/Low	Durham County Diverse/Low	Out-of-State Diverse/Low	Out-of-State Diverse/Low	Yes
Patricia	Perquimans County Not Diverse/Low	Same	Same	Wake County Diverse/Middle (Left after 1 year)	No
Alice	Guilford County Low	Same	*Alternative HS Diverse/Low	Wake County Diverse/High	Yes
Leigh	Wake County Diverse/Low	Wake County Diverse/Low	Wake County Diverse/Low	*Literacy Coach	Yes

*Alice and Leigh spent half of their year teaching in other jobs before spending the other half in a high/middle class school in Wake County.

To be clear, none of the teachers left their schools due to student demographics, negative school working conditions, or discouraging student relationships. In fact, one participant, Patricia, stated explicitly how hard it was to leave her school because of her students, or “her babies,” as she called them:

I was totally happy there. Leaving there was very, very hard. It was hard leaving my babies. I was at the point where the kids that were freshmen were going to be seniors and I was going to be teaching a lot of them. So it was hard, but that's the only reason I left. It had nothing to do with being unhappy.

Patricia explained that she was not “unhappy” but was “totally happy” and the only reason she left was financial because, as she explained, “I was renting a house and my landlord put the house up for sale after offering it to me knowing that I couldn't afford it on my teacher's salary.” Patricia's landlord, therefore, spurred her move. Her choice for Wake County, however, was to be closer to friends and lifestyle reasons, just as Florida (2014) asserted. In fact, Patricia's reason for moving to Wake County was similar to several of the teachers who stated it was primarily a personal reason ($n = 3$) or because it was closer to family ($n = 3$), friends ($n = 2$) and, as three listed, their alma mater's football games ($n = 3$). Only Chris explicitly stated that it was also because of the district's financial supplement, which is an additional monetary increase on the salary based on the local district's taxes (Ball, 2016).

In summary, I claim school context is important, but not only or even primarily in the way research has explained, as based on working conditions or poverty. Instead, I learned from these teacher participants that context is important regarding the time and duration of staying at school ($n = 3$) and relative to the context surrounding the school (i.e., $n = 5$, sought access to family, friends, and preferred lifestyle).

While context was important especially in the beginning years, the students and the teacher participants' purpose in teaching became increasingly central to how these eight participants described the good life. In the next section, I describe how I learned that these eight teacher-leader participants' relationships with students changed in their purpose and increased their passion as they earned their National Board Certification ($n = 8$).

The National Board Certification Years: Educating and Engaging the Students

In this section, I claim that all eight teachers in this dissertation study, who stated they flourished in their National Board Certification years ($n = 8$), including their renewal 10 years later ($n = 3$), discussed *engaging* students in learning as the vehicle for building and improving relationships as integral to the good life. To be clear, I use *educating* and *engaging* interchangeably and, with these terms, I mean these participants became more intentional in their classroom practices and lesson plans to promote student success.

To be specific, most participants ($n = 5$) highlighted educating students for their growth as major change, or *transformation*, in their purpose with pedagogy. Rather than focusing on managing student behavior, they discussed with me how their lessons changed and were geared towards their students in a more reflective and intentional manner during their National Board Years. Therefore, by transform, I mean the dictionary definition, which is “make a marked change in the form, nature, or appearance of” (Oxford Dictionary, 2018, n.p.). In contrast, the other three participants, Molly, Chris and Patricia, who all happen to teach Math and all passed the National Board Certification process their first time, explained that for them this purpose of *engaging* students was a refreshing *shift* rather than a transformation.

As a brief reminder of the contexts surrounding these eight teachers regarding the National Board Certification, I want to offer a few quick facts:

1. Of this group of eight teachers, three did not pass the certification their first time (Saul, Danielle, and Leigh).
2. Of this group, four teachers had taught long enough (i.e., at least 10 years since they had first passed their National Board Certification) by the time of our interview to go

through an abbreviated process to renew their National Board Certification (Molly, Ella, Alice, Patricia).

Also, as a brief reminder, the National Board Certification is a nationwide available process for teachers to submit documentation to show that they are “accomplished” teachers and leaders (npts.com, 2017), and teachers are not allowed to fully apply or earn their Boards until their fourth full year of teaching. Research has shown that the National Board Certification process has shown to help students improve student achievement and improve teacher effectiveness (Belson & Husted, 2015; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015). Importantly, in North Carolina, the state paid for teachers to earn their National Boards until 2013, so six of the participants did not have to pay the \$2,500 to apply, which left Danielle and Chris, who have only taught 10 years, to pay for their application. Also, all eight participants ($n = 8$) stated that they also did their Boards for the “pay” increase, which is 12% on top of their salary in North Carolina.

To be clear, in this section, I explain my claim that all eight teachers believed their experiences after their fourth year of teaching, and through the National Board process, influenced their transformation ($n = 5$) or shift ($n = 3$) in engaging students for their success as the main purpose in their relationships with students. This finding aligned with the literature in that many of the teachers articulated they perceived their teaching to improve because of the National Board Certification process (McKenzie, 2013).

To give an overview of these findings, I offer a brief table, Table 12, to show the two claims that these participants emphasized their purpose to educate, or as I previously defined it, to be intentional in their classroom practices—with the intentions to see students grow as a transformation ($n = 5$) and a shift ($n = 3$) that was integrated into how they understood the good life or their own flourishing.

Table 12

Educating as a Purpose in NBCT Years

Educating students as a <u>transformation</u> in purpose	Danielle, Saul, Ella, Alice, and Leigh (5/8)
Educating students as a <u>shift</u> in purpose	Patricia, Molly, and Chris (3/8) *Math teachers

In the next section, I claim that Ella, Saul, and Danielle are the best examples of all five participants who described a *transformation* of their purpose and discussed their “kismet” (Saul, i.e., an ‘aha’ or eureka) moments when they realized how to focus their purpose on educating students. As they told me about their purpose to influence student learning, I realized this was at the center of their relationships with students and they understood their teaching as the good life. Then, in slight contrast, I explain how Chris and Patricia specifically illuminated their *purpose* of educating students being a *shift* that strengthened their pedagogy and their description of how they found meaning integrated in their good life during their National Board Years.

Educating Students as a Transformation in Purpose

An important finding for how I understood these eight teacher participants’ descriptions of their own flourishing, specifically during their National Board Certification process (Research Question 1), was their *transformation* in their purpose of educating and engaging their students. Specifically, I learned that the National Board Certification process enlightened their own transformation by improving how they educated students and re-focused their purpose in teaching on crafting strong lessons. For these five participants, I claim that paying attention to the students, their actions, and their learning, rather than only focusing on their personal actions as a teacher or merely managing student behavior, improved their relationships with students and

how they understood their own flourishing. To highlight this finding, I explain how Ella, Saul, and Danielle radically transformed their purpose and found it engaged them, too, in the good life—especially the good life of teaching.

Ella’s “realization” that “it’s what the kids are doing.” For example, I learned from Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist how the National Boards process transformed her way of thinking, from being “God’s gift to teaching” to humility and seeing the value of the kids’ own “growth” as more vital. To be specific, Ella talked about how the National Board process was a transformation because her original approach was that she claimed, “Of course I could do [teach]. I mean, of course it was terrible and hard but, I mean, I was destined to do this. [Laughs].” Attempting the process of “the Boards,” as it was sometimes called colloquially, was “all-consuming that year,” and she “realized” that as “hard working” as she was, she also needed to be “humbled:”

I really thought I was going to be super-teacher, so of course super-teacher needed this patch on her cape. So that was really important. But it humbled me. That whole process really humbled me because it really made me realize that I actually was not a good teacher.

Even though Ella had won Teacher of the Year and described herself as an aspiring “super-teacher” who led mini-student movements, coached classes, and brought “enthusiasm and creativity to [her] PLT,” the National Board process helped her with her *wide-awakeness* (Greene, 1977, p. 119) relative to her relationship with students. Or as she said:

Well, like I said before, I thought that teaching was about what I was doing, and so I had often tried to explain how great my teaching was through that lens of, “Well, I did this and I did that. I did this other thing. . . .” Suddenly, the national boards really didn’t give a hoot what I was doing. They wanted to know what the kids were doing and how I knew they were doing it, and then how I knew how they were growing and how I could document that, and I just had not been teaching that way. So it became a real challenge. because I had to try and . . . since I was not systematically teaching that way, I had to try and catch kids accidentally showing growth and me scaffolding them. But that didn’t really just catch process, you know what I mean? Like now . . . but now that I’ve national

boards, it wouldn't be a problem. Like I would, "Oh, I'll pick these four kids or these five kids," and I know they're going to show growth. I know—but back then I just wasn't teaching that way, and so I had to like do all these different assignments and approaches and keep all their work, and then on the back end try and connect some dots and write it as if it was all intentioned and with vision. [Chuckles] And that was fine. I mean, it got me through the process and I got certified. But that wasn't the most important part. The most important part was the fact that I could now articulate that and say, "Oh, what I'm doing isn't the most important part of teaching." And so that was a real . . . that was a big pivot in my understanding of teaching and learning.

As Ella herself emphasized, "the most important part" was not that she got certified, but that she could "now articulate and say, 'Oh, what I'm doing isn't the most important part of teaching.'"

Similar to the movies she had adored, Ella had made herself the protagonist, and the National Boards helped her reflect when she said, "I think early in my teaching career we were so focused on edutainment that we didn't do a whole lot with brain research, we didn't do a whole lot with authentic assessment." Therefore, this change from just entertaining or managing the students to helping them learn in authentic ways was an important "shift" for Ella—even though really it was a radical transformation. As she explained next, this discovery, however, did not slow her down in her enthusiasm towards her profession or her students.

I think at some point enthusiasm can't make up for everything, and maybe it's a little overvalued in the educational context because a charismatic teacher at the front of the room isn't really what students need. They really need someone who will make them the focus. The teacher at the front of the room should not be the focus. That's what national board certification did for me. It made me realize that great teaching isn't about what I'm doing. It's about what the kids are doing. And that shift happened way too late in my teaching career.

Ella's focus on the students' learning and "what the kids are doing" happened "way too late" in her career, according to her, but she believed that they "really need someone who will make them focus." This was her purpose, and she said she was still striving for "great teaching," as she relayed:

I'm just like a true believer, you know? And I'm a very . . . I'm an idealist. And so yeah, I just can't . . . if you're a true believer, you don't really know when to stop. So I never show up in my classroom. . . . I won't say never but, I mean, every day it's got to be as close to a hundred percent perfect as I can get it.

This nonstop, “true-believer” attitude encompassed Ella’s passion for the students and her purpose to make every day as “a hundred percent perfect” as she can get it for them.

Saul’s “empowering” and Danielle’s “engaging” students. With a similar flavor of passion and dedication, I claim that Saul—The Steady Problem Solver and a 20-year English teacher, and Danielle—Defender of Intellect and a 10-year ESL teacher, transformed their purpose with students during their National Board Certification years in the same way as Ella and the other participants ($n = 5$) did: with tremendous humility and never-ending epiphanies. While Saul did not pass his first time, he explained the moment he transformed (my words) and “realized” he needed to change:

I had a kismet moment where I realized what I was doing is I was trying to focus too much on what I had done right and justifying that I was a good teacher, and I went, “Hmm, that’s not what they’re asking me. They’re asking me to identify what I did not do right and to prove that what I’ve learned will empower students in the future.”

The point of learning to “empower students” rather than justifying his own actions and position as a teacher was a big turning point. This moment also gave Saul a sense of “accomplishment,” a word he and Danielle both used to describe their own flourishing. Similarly, Danielle, who also did not pass her first time, articulated her own major transformation of focusing on educating the students, rather than just managing their behavior as the way she showed she cared. She explained how the National Board process:

made me feel like I had some authority in my instincts. It validated my instincts as an educator, as a teacher. I guess it’s a little bit like when you’ve gone to grad school, you’ve learned some theory and you have internal knowledge to back up what you do and the decisions you make. And so after having been through that process of all that meticulous reflecting, I think it kind of sticks with you and it validates that reflection is important and it, yeah, I think you keep doing it. I think I did incorporate that more into

my practice, and to check for these things. . . . Like, am I engaging my learners in these different environments, small group, whole group? Am I building my assessment with my goals in mind, making the assessment and making sure my instruction, not just what I'm assessing, do I let them use all domains of language? Do I let them think critically?

Danielle's reflection of her own practice led her to emphasize that the purpose of her role in the classroom is to "engage" learners in order to educate them. Her series of self-reflective questions here like "Am I building assessments with my goals in mind?" also show her critical self-reflection (Schön, 1987; Schussler & Murrell, 2016; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006) towards the end of improving and "validating" her own "instincts." As Danielle, Saul, and Ella showed, the practice of self-reflection emerged as crucial to the importance of the teacher-student relationship and the good life of teaching.

In the beginning years, the majority of teacher participants ($n = 5$) focused on their classroom and *managing* the behavior of their students, while in the later years they also prioritized *engaging* and *educating* their students with their assessments and ongoing feedback. For five of them, this was a transformation due to their National Board experience, which forced them to reflect more critically on their practice and their relationships with students. While Patricia and a few others explained they had always focused both on managing and on educating students ($n = 3$), the transformation for Danielle, Ella, Saul, Leigh, and Alice drew them closer to the good life as their new success with student growth gave them a sense of purpose, meaning, and accomplishment—and, in reflection, a sense of practical wisdom. This aligns with the research which has shown that through "authentic field-based practice" (Schussler & Murrell, 2016, p. 281), teachers who reflect internally on their practice tend to not repeat old habits—this *phronēsis* or practical wisdom, a key thread in flourishing. In the next section, I highlight my claim that Patricia and Chris's National Board experience, much like Molly's too, evidenced their shift in purpose on educating students (beyond just managing them) and how the fruition of

the good life for them was through what they deemed as seeing success with their students or *good* teaching.

Educating Students as a Shift in Purpose

In this section, I claim that the three Math teachers described their purpose in relating with students and the good life of teaching as consistently tied to teaching *well*, which was a shift that improved through the National Board process. For them, their meaning was always derived from their ability to educate their students, but during our interviews I realized that the National Board process helped them refine this focus on *good* teaching. I highlight Patricia mainly and then give some insights from Chris, as their combined revelations best show how all three Math teachers shifted their purpose and experienced the good life with their students.

Patricia’s shift into more “reflective practice.” Patricia, to me, exemplified how the National Board Certification experience gave her an opportunity to incorporate more reflection into her pedagogy and shift her practice towards even better teaching. In other words, for Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue, doing this process was “just the next step. I knew I was going to do it as soon as I was eligible to do it. So as soon as I was done with my third full year, then I just knew that was the next thing I was going to do.” She explained that, overall, she did not think it was “as stressful as other people had made it sound.” For her, she explained how the Boards process was not “out of the ordinary:”

I felt like that the things that the process asked me to do weren’t out of the ordinary. They were things that generally happened within my classroom. So I thought it just kind of gave me an opportunity to put that on paper.

The NBCT process for her was an “opportunity” to show how she focused on educating students in her classroom and how she was “adventurous,” which she explained as follows:

I was not unwilling to try something different sometimes . . . I try to do things that were a little more adventurous probably because I taught lower-level students. I try to do a little bit more in the investigation and discovery area.

Patricia explained that while teaching lower-level students, she had realized early in her career that “investigation and discovery” engaged the students more, so these were practices she was already doing.

In fact, while she was videotaping her class, which is one of the requirements for the process, she “enjoyed” seeing her students show their learning and grew more “conscientious” about the language the students used. She explained that the students’ language showed her that they were learning. For example, Patricia stated:

And you know, a lot of times you only realize all the things kids do until you video them and you get the opportunity to watch some of that, but it just kind of . . . it confirmed that the majority of my students did what they were supposed to do but also kids speak the language of math, which I think made me feel really good. They didn’t always know when the camera was on them, so a lot of times the conversations that were videoed were very natural because, again, they didn’t know that they were being videoed. And so just kind of seeing really and hearing students I think was the biggest takeaway and I think it made me always be more conscientious about that, just in my general movements around the classroom to always kind of have the listening ear whether they know it or not on what they’re saying.

Patricia was proud of how “natural” the students were on her video and articulated that the shift she made was paying closer attention to her own “listening ear” with her students in class.

Overall, the Boards did not transform her *purpose* to educate students, although she “felt like she learned a lot” and emphasized that “it was very reflective.” Even though there were only slight shifts, or tweaks, in Patricia’s relationships with the students during her National Board Years, she emphasized the experience “built that practice in . . . much more so than it was prior to doing the National Boards.” Importantly, one of the highlights of Patricia’s discussion around her Boards and her care for the education of her students was that she emphasized her belief in giving them constant feedback. The following excerpts show Patricia’s in-depth discussion of

how she has always given students immediate feedback as a way to guarantee her learning and continue her own reflective practice, an important aspect to flourishing because self-reflection promotes practical wisdom (Higgins, 2011).

Patricia described this specific practice in relation to how she just recently completed the Renewal process for her National Board Certification:

I know what went well, I know what didn't. I'd know immediately if I need some big changes, and I think that's the piece that's missing for a lot of people because if you give an assignment and you don't grade it for two weeks that was two weeks of a missed opportunity where you could immediately have corrected and built upon that with students. And students learn that. I mean, students know that they're going to get immediate feedback from me. And because of that I think they're more willing to take risks, which gives me an opportunity to take risks as well and let them try some new things because they know that they're going to get feedback and know what went well and what didn't immediately. And I think for me that's a large part of why I'm able to the next day go ahead and say, "Okay, well, let me make myself a note because this part of the lesson went really well but I'm going to have to totally rethink this next part because this is where the students had the misconceptions."

Patricia explained how her "immediate feedback" helped students to be "more willing to take risks, which gives [her] an opportunity to take risks as well." While she did not use the word *relationship* explicitly, her description and statement that the feedback is "from me" implied an immense care and passion for the education of her students as her primary focus and the reason she gives frequent, immediate "feedback" for her students.

The year she earned her Boards, Patricia said, almost in passing, that she was in a unfriendly environment, which I discuss more in Chapter VI. Due to her colleagues, she left the next year, but said that "I mean, I love my kids and within my classroom things were totally fine." Though she "wasn't happy" with the administration or a few of her peers, she said, "When I was in my classroom, those were the best parts." Patricia's words resonate with Conway's (2012) finding from her research with flourishing professors in higher education, in that the struggle around her classroom was not the primary focus for her. Instead, Patricia flourished

because she focused on *teaching well* for her students and relating with them, specifically, as their educator.

Chris's shift away from unnecessary leadership. Similarly, Chris—The Crusader for Kids, only made a few tweaks and shifts in how he cared about his students through the purpose of educating them. In fact, as I previously mentioned, he won First-Year Teacher of the Year and was still coaching when he pursued his National Board Certification. The year he applied for the Boards, he had just been promoted to Varsity coach. He remembered that the most relevant tweak he made was realizing that some of the leadership he had taken on may not be as valuable to his students as he originally thought. He explained:

Some of the things I've done I think are really valuable, but then to think critically about like how do they impact student achievement, because that's all they care about, that was hard to do. It was hard to really nail down and get on pencil and paper like how does some accolade or some certification or something, like how did this actually impact students in my classroom. So yeah, I thought that was the toughest. Because you had to...you know, the other entries you're actually talking about your students and what you do. That one you're taking things that kind of seem somewhat removed from the classroom and having to figure out how it makes you a better teacher. And then there were some things that I had "accomplished" that I didn't write about because I didn't think they had really impacted my students, so it made me think like, "Well, was that really worth your time if it didn't . . . ?"

For Chris, the National Board entry he described about showing his own personal accomplishments was "awkward" for him to write, yet he described how he saw the importance of his extra roles positively impacting how he was educating his students. He gave an example of leading a "Smart Board Training," which he realized did not actually change how he taught. Therefore, by reflecting on all of his leadership roles, he revisited and re-affirmed his own purpose as educating students—and educating them *well* as the most important aspect of his teaching and relating to students. He also highlighted how this point of his career and this

process pushed him “to think critically . . . about student achievement,” which for the teachers in the next section was the major transformation in their purpose in relating to students. To me, it could be the straightforward nature of the subject matter, but the National Board process only seemed to help Chris, as it did Patricia and Molly, feel strongly about their foundation of pedagogy in their classroom as the vehicle for relating to students and living the good life.

In summary, all eight teacher participants emphasized that it was *through* their National Board Certification experience that teaching *well* and educating students was their purpose and their passion for the good life. Whether it was a transformative change ($n = 5$) or merely a shift ($n = 3$) in practice, all eight teachers cultivated relationships with their students by influencing their success and spending less time focused on students’ or their own behavior, and more time on their lessons and pedagogy as they saw the value of teaching *well* to the good life.

In the next section, I explain how the eight teacher-leaders described and understood relationships with students as important to their own flourishing in the most recent years of teaching (AY 2016-2017), not just as showing students they care by improving their classroom management or growing in their ability to teach *well*, but also by inviting students into the *good life* with them as a community.

Teaching and Leading Today: Cultivating Community With Students

In this section, I claim that all eight teachers in this study, who described themselves as flourishing in their most recent year of teaching ($n = 8$), emphasized their purpose in cultivating community (Block, 2009; Cherkowski, 2012; Drago-Severson, 2013) with their students, based on years of practical wisdom and reflection of how, when, and why community with their students matters to them. Importantly, I claim that where teachers were in their career (i.e., early career [around 10-15 years], mid-career [around 20 years], or late-career [over 25 years]) at the

time of our interview altered how they framed their most recent personal relationships with students and framing for community. For example, teachers who were in their early career stage (i.e., 10-15 years of experience) were looking forward to students coming back and sharing their life and successes (n = 4, early career). Meanwhile, teachers with about 20 years of experience seemed to experience a momentary disconnect with their current students and cherished the fond memories of former students (n = 2, mid-career). Finally, the two teachers with over 25 years of experience epitomized their practical wisdom through their creative ways of cultivating sustainable communities with current and former students (n = 2, late career).

While researchers like Cherkowski (2012) and Drago-Severson (2013) noted the importance of collegiality and building relationships with other colleagues, which I discuss in Chapter VI, I learned from these participants that they also wanted community with their students. Additionally, in this section, I highlight that the culmination of each of the teachers' most recently established practical wisdom as their reflection on their relationships offered them long-term rewards and lasting relationships with their students (Hansen, 1994). As I previously explained, at the time of this interview, the teachers had different years of experience and this was the vantage point from which they described their teaching.

In Table 13, I explain the participants, their years of experience, and their approach to community with students. As the table shows, two teacher participants had approximately the same number of years of experience within a year or two of the approximation and each other for every 5 years. I also show an overview of the shifts within their perceptions of community, which I describe in greater detail later.

Table 13

Years of Experience and Approach to Community with Students

Participants	Approximate Experience	Approach to Community
Danielle—The Defender of Intellect Chris—The Crusader for Kids	10 years	Students come back and share life
Leigh—The Leader of Learning Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue	15 years	Students come back and share life
Saul—The Steady Problem Solve Molly—The Mother of Extremes	20 years	Students remember me New disconnections (see Chapter VI)
Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate	25 years	Creation, cultivation, and sustaining communities of students

As I convey in Table 13, I learned that the teachers' years of experience tended to characterize their role and their expectations of building community with students. It is important to note I am aware that two cases do not usually make a pattern; however, the similarities across these cases, I believe, were worth noting while the overarching understanding across all participants was that their desire to be remembered *by their students* (n = 8) was critical to how they made sense of teaching as the *good life*.

Early-Career Teachers Hope Students “Come Back”

In this section, I describe my claim that teachers with 10-15 years of experience explained the value of their community of students “coming back” to see them as integral to the good life, especially within this last academic year. To do so, I highlight how Danielle, Chris, and Leigh each commented on this hope for community in various ways, but all connected to the ways they planned on continuing the connection. As Patricia said previously, “weddings and baby-showers” are not the only way to stay connected, but for each of the teacher participants, sharing their lives with students beyond the classroom was important to the good life.

Danielle hopes they come back to school. First, I highlight Danielle, an ESL teacher with approximately 10 years of experience. Danielle explicitly talked to me about how she

“would want students to come back and visit the school” and that would make her feel good. She also spoke of this “down the road, long-term” as a goal with her students and a way she would view herself as a “successful teacher.” For Danielle, her goal was to help her English language learners to “stay in school,” so as to “be able to see how they turned out and connect with them. That’s a reward that I would hope to have in the long-term.” Danielle saw this long-term possibility of a community with students beyond the classroom as rewarding, which all eight participants mentioned as well—not just the eight early-career teachers.

Chris sees students at his local grocery store. Similarly, Chris, the Math teacher with 10 years of experience, explained earlier that relationships with students were what he was “best at” as a teacher, so the idea of a long-term relationship with them was most meaningful to him—just like Danielle, Leigh and Patricia. He articulated that the joyfulness of his career was:

hands down, no question, keeping in communication with former students. So I see former students all the time because I kind of live in the community that I taught in. I keep in touch with a lot of kids that I taught or coached. So the fact that they want to keep in touch with me is affirmation that I have been a positive influence and that is really invigorating.

With emphasis, Chris said “hands down, no question” for how relationships brought joy to his career. For him, it was “invigorating” and an “affirmation” to see that he has been a “positive influence.” In fact, living in the same community he taught in was something Chris “wanted to do,” as he explained next:

I lived in the community, which is something I wanted to do. So that was it for me. It was really investing a hundred percent into, I don’t want to say into my job, but into my job and my community where I worked. Like it didn’t freak me out to see a parent when I was buying a case of beer at the grocery store. If I saw a kid and his family eating dinner at a restaurant across the road, I would go say hello. I didn’t want to hide in the corner because, “Oh no, I don’t want to see students outside of school.” That was not me at all. I wanted to be like all in on the community of my school that has existed for way longer than I’ve been a part of it.

Again, Chris said he wanted to be “all in on the community of my school” to emphasize the importance of community with his students and their parents in the school where he taught. For him, “it was really investing a hundred percent” and he emphasized that he was not only into his job but “into my job and my community.” New teachers, as he referenced, may “hide in the corner,” but as he said in his first quote, it was “invigorating” for him. Chris, who tended to get straight to the point in our interviews, even elaborated on why students remembering him is important to him when he said:

Well, it’s irrational for humans to communicate with people that they don’t like. Nobody calls their enemies and says, ‘Hey, how are things?’ or like. . . . So the fact that a former student makes an effort to be in contact and like will care about what I’m doing and want to share what they’re doing means that at some point in their four years of high school I was a person that they thought, “I’m really thankful that he was somehow involved in my school.”

The “care” Chris referenced was a central part of *purpose*—a key aspect of flourishing, and the fact that students “make an effort to be in contact” showed Chris that the effort he put in as a teacher made an impact. While Chris was effusive in his desire to build a long-term and deep community with his students, Leigh—The Leader of Learning, with approximately 5 more years of experience than Chris, was already cherishing her students who returned to school to maintain a relationship with her beyond the classroom.

Leigh’s on Instagram with her students. Echoing the importance of the effort students made to come back, Leigh described a time when two of her “former students . . . came by to see [her]”:

I kid you not, like it will make me teary if I think about it too hard, the kid parked his car, got out of his car and ran to me—ran to me—and then put the sweetest—just made me cry—put the sweetest . . . like had to take a picture with me. He said, “This is going on Instagram,” and just the words that he said, I went, “Oh my gosh.” It’s seeing—I ran into another former student a while ago and his little boy toddled on over to me, and I was like, “Geez, my babies are having babies.” Because that’s—and I tell them, I’m like, “You are my . . . I don’t have any kids of my own right yet, so you are my children and

you're going to be my children. Even when I do have children of my own, even when you have children of your own, you're still going to be mine."

Leigh's emotion as she remembered the students coming to see her was exceedingly apparent in her voice, in addition to her stating, "It will make me teary." For Leigh, like for Chris, Danielle, and Patricia who also referred to her students as "my babies," she talked about how she felt belonging with her students when she calls them "mine." The emphasis on community is a crucial aspect of flourishing and well-being, as Block (2009) explained in the first lines of his book: "The social fabric of a community is formed from an expanding shared sense of belonging . . . only when we are connected and care for the well-being of the whole . . ." (p. 1). The vision of their long-term impact was "success" for Danielle, "invigorating" for Chris, or "just something that touches me" for Leigh.

In the next section, I claim that teachers with approximately 20 years of experience also highlighted, briefly, the value of their students remembering them, but alluded to the fact that their students in their current classes had changed.

Mid-Career Teachers Accept "Young people are young people"

In this section, I describe my claim about the two teachers who have taught for approximately 20 years, Molly—The Mother of Extremes and Saul—The Steady Problem Solver. Rather than emphasizing their community with their students as the majority of the teachers in this study did ($n = 6$), these two teacher participants, Molly and Saul, discussed their struggle to cultivate the intimate and connected community they once did and aspired to do.

Saul's "positive energy" with students. First, Saul reflected that the transitions of his career have made it a little bit more challenging to connect with students most recently (AY 2016-2017). He was also the one who said, "Young people are young people," which he followed with, "They're supposed to ignore me when I talk. They're supposed to try my

patience. They're supposed to be interested in other things more than what I'm saying." For Saul, this was not a struggle for him but rather his neutral acceptance of how he did not take any of their misbehaving personally.

Because he recently switched to an online learning-centered school, he explained that for him personally, "I think the significant struggle for me was that I was not getting the same positive energy from groups of students as I'm used to" through the online platform. To be clear, Saul, who is in a mid-career stage, spent his last year of teaching at a school that offers flexible scheduling to students by providing most required courses online rather than in a school building. Despite of his own adjustment, and missing the "positive energy" from a classroom of students, he suggested that he believed this is best for students today:

I think students as learners are changing in ways that the district is trying to keep up with. We recognize that that the seat time the state removed . . . they removed the seat time requirement but basically what they did is they disallowed districts to fail students because they haven't met seat time, and what that's done is really empowered more of a mastery-based approach but we can't figure out exactly what that means yet, right? I mean, there's particular behaviors we want students to engage in that are not related to academics. There's just this traditional mindset of what school means, and I really think that the creativity piece, what county and what good educators recognize is that students, they vary so much in their skill set and motivation that we have to be creative to meet them in a more flexible environment versus—and I'm not saying a traditional teacher can't be flexible, but like the flexibility is built into the type of content you're using, and digital being a big part of that and flexible, enrolling due dates, that type of stuff.

Saul is now in a "nontraditional" setting that works with students primarily through an online platform, and emphasized his need to be "flexible" just as schools need to be "flexible" with a "mastery-based approach." Rather than focusing on how to connect with students on a personal level, Saul is still passionate about figuring out how to be "creative" to help "motivate" students to learn.

Molly's "different approach" with students. Although Saul was struggling due to a digital learning platform, Molly's connections with students have also changed for her over time

and she felt very different most recently. In fact, Molly, who has taught about 20 years just like Saul, echoed his sentiment about “connection” being part of her new struggle:

I’ve never had a group of students that I can’t even get to be quiet just long enough for me to give directions. But you know, I also have had multiple students arrested probably since I talked to you last in that classroom. I mean, it’s getting to the point where I was like, ‘Am I going to be able to keep doing this?’ because I don’t feel like I am in an environment where I can teach. . . . But I always try to think positive and I’m hoping next year with our different approach to Math One—because that’s where most of my energy goes and why I’m so excited. It’s trying to engage those kids, get them to come to school, to do anything outside of class, to pick up a calculator.

Molly, like Saul, was thinking “positive” and “hoping next year with a different approach” she would be able to reach kids and “Get them to come to school, to do anything outside of class, to pick up a calculator.” While she admitted to having “a group of students” she struggled to teach, she also explained that “my other group of kids who tested well had the highest scores out of anybody from the pre-cal students.” She claimed she did not do “anything special,” and in our interview, she emphasized her disconnect from her most current “young people,” as Saul described them. Both Molly and Saul noticed a change in their students, yet it did not change their value of their community with former students or trying to create new community with their current ones.

Despite this feeling of disconnection, Molly admitted that some of the students she struggled with the most were the ones who ended up “remember[ing] you.” In her words, “But you know, those kids that remember you” and say to their friends ‘She was the best teacher. If it wasn’t for her . . . ’” Molly explained to me that every time she has heard a student, even one who caused her trouble, express how she has changed his or her life, she feels affirmed in her connections and care of the students. As Molly said to me, “I was like, ‘Yup, I’m in the right place.’” Even though Molly struggled this last year, she still believed she was “in the right place” and was “excited” to “engage kids,” just like Saul who was sacrificing the “positive energy”

from a classroom to meet students where they are—online. In a way, they realized that they were on the precipice of embarking on a different kind of community—just one they had not figured out yet.

In the next section, I describe my claim that the veteran teachers with over 25 years of experience were the most vocal and expressive about the long-term relationships and community they built with their students. This emphasis on their practical wisdom and focus on the *moral heart* (Hansen, 2001) of teaching was very important to them regarding how they connected with students within and beyond the classroom.

Later-Career Teachers Create Communities: “Be a goose” and “Saturday Pancakes”

Last, in this section, I claim that Alice—The Audacious Advocate/Actress and Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist, both of whom had about 25 years of experience, emphasized the community they built with their students and *between* their students, too, as a critical component of their flourishing. In this section, I highlight the quotes in the subtitle through two illustrative stories from Alice and Ella, respectively. First, I describe how I learned about the ways Alice created a community of inclusion through a theme of “geese” or being “a goose” in her classroom. Following my description of Alice’s community of geese as an exemplar of her care in cultivating community, I then describe Ella’s “pancake breakfasts,” which she (still) held every Saturday for her former students. For both Alice and Ella, the cultivation of and living through these communities give them “hope” and sustain them in the good life.

Alice’s geese. With over 25 years of experience, Alice has worked hard both on her classroom and herself to create the environment she wants for her students, which was especially challenging this last year with a divisive election (AY 2016-2018). While thinking about her

classes this past year, Alice explained to me that she got a “sense of hope” when she saw her students “work together despite differences,” or as she said:

I think even now that’s where I find joy and that’s where I flourish today. Like the day after the election this year, I found hope and joy in my classroom because of how my students reacted with each other. So I don’t think that has changed even in twenty-five years.

In fact, for Alice, this emphasis on community and “find[ing] joy” was important to her, even when she reflected back on her first years of teaching. While she also described that it was “where [she] flourish[es] today,” she showed her own practical wisdom in cultivating community—and how she has changed in her ability to do it with intentionality—when she compared her teaching today to her first years of teaching yearbook decades ago.

Remembering the scenario from her first years of teaching, Alice described how the administration had banned a yearbook party “because it had the word *party* in it” and, in response, the kids collaborated for a “sit-in” in protest. She remembered feeling “that investment and feeling a part of it” when she said:

Looking back on it, the joy was not from the sit-in that the kids staged in the parking lot the next day in support of the yearbook staff but it was from seeing kids that had not found a way to join a community, kind of band together. I can look at that now and say that, but I don’t know that I was smart enough to say that then.

Alice explained that “seeing kids that had not found a way to join a community” and how they used this as an opportunity to “band together” stood out as important to her, which is part of why her epithet relate to her being an advocate. The practical wisdom stands out because she reflected that “I don’t know that I was smart enough to say that then,” hinting that she felt “joy” at that time, but only now she can articulate why.

While this may be idiosyncratic to Alice, her actions showed how she has worked hard on cultivating a community to give her students a sense of belonging, especially in the last year

when the tension was heightened due to the controversial presidential election. Already describing to me how her “hope” and “joy” were from “how my students reacted with each other,” the background of how her students got to this point—the day after the election—showed me Alice’s own investment in community. To do so, she explained how she used the theme of “geese” to unite her students:

Oh my God. The election—I had amazing senior classes last fall. I had two classes of honors and one class of AP and, surprisingly, my honors classes bought into—I can’t remember if I told you this earlier, so please stop me. But I teach and just how geese fly together in V-formation and you had ninety-three percent greater flying power if you fly in formation and you take turns at flying point, and if somebody falls out of formation you go down and would help until either that goose can fly again or . . . Anyway, I really teach that and the kids buy into it. And I use “goose” as a noun, like goose, and the kids use that too by the end of the semester and were doing their big senior presentations. They use it regularly and they talk about getting your goose, “Oh, you’re such a goose,” “That was such a great goose presentation,” or “Make sure you get honks.”

Importantly, she described how geese “fly together” and have “greater flying power” together in order to relay to her students that “if somebody falls out of formation, you go down and would help.” For Alice, who first described teaching as a way to “escape” an abusive boyfriend and then in the last academic year encouraged her students to look out for each other, demonstrated to me her own change over time as a teacher. She continued to describe why her “geese” teachings were important regarding the election:

Anyway, so they had bought into that, and prior to the day of the election we had talked in my classes and we had talked about the appropriate way to act the day after no matter who won. And on the morning of the election, when I think everybody still assumed Hillary was going to win, I talked to the kids and I said, “It is not about today. It is about tomorrow and it is about how you respond and how you treat each other tomorrow. Today, nothing’s any different. It is tomorrow.” So I’d already laid the groundwork for that.

Alice explained that having “laid the groundwork for that” and for her kids to “respond and treat each other” was important to her, not only because of the divisive issues raised by the election,

but also because the *Washington Post* had chosen her class “to shadow” the day after the election. She explained:

And so he was showing up all the good, and then the whole landscape changed that night with the election. And so he called me the next morning and, strangely enough, I thought that would in the story of how people responded to this the next day, and he said, “The landscape of the story changed. We’re not doing that story anymore.” So I’m like, “Oh, okay. Well, whatever.”

It is worth noting the in-the-minute flexibility Alice showed in response to the *Post*’s change of plans. In fact, Alice was less concerned about the *Post* and more concerned about her colleagues as she explained to me how the “teachers were very upset” and their message boards focused on “trying to help younger teachers” know “what you need to do and say or not say.”

Alice then told the rest of the story of her own class and community:

The next morning, we just . . . we held hands and, as silly as it sounds, we did and we said, “This is about us and knowing who the people around us are.” And I had two Muslim kids in my first period and they cried, just boohooed, and we allowed that to happen. And I got a couple of letters from parents after that saying, “Thank you, my son felt safe to do this. My son felt safe to be . . .” And from both sides. I got a Muslim parent write me, and I got a Trump supporter parent say, “In these times, my son still felt safe to say that was who he had voted for.” So I don’t think it was necessarily what happened after the election or how I dealt with it. I truly believe it was everything leading up to it and just that amazing group, the dynamics of that group of kids in that classroom. They were amazing. And so they handled it well.

Emphasizing how “they handled it so well,” and “as silly as it sounds,” she described how “we held hands.” Within her classroom, students who were Trump supporters and those who were not “felt safe” and “held hands” because of the “dynamics of that group of kids in that classroom.” For Alice, this was a powerful moment of her school year, and she remembered, “As the kids said, ‘We were geese. We were geese together.’” Alice’s story of her “geese” after election day was a testament to the importance of the community she built in her classroom during a divisive year. While it “evolved in an organic way” (Block, 2009, p. 3) the day of the election, it was due to Alice’s own “joy” and “hope” that she had invested in the students or the

“groundwork,” as she put it, during the weeks and months leading up to those moments. For Alice, like Ella, the 20-plus years of experience had taught her the amount of prework and energy it takes to bring students together, such that if and when a crisis or a moment occurs that could possibly tear the students apart, they can “hold hands” with each other instead. This showed Alice’s practical wisdom and learning over time and through experience, which the other six participants had not yet mastered.

Ella’s “pancakes.” Similar to Alice’s extra effort to create a united community in her classroom, Ella invested in her “former students,” who she contended were “actually keeping [her] kind of sane” and had “been really rewarding.” In other words, spending extra time with her former students was helping her through what had been a difficult last year for her too. In addition to the tension with the election, Ella had agreed to teach a new class and had encountered several additional and unplanned challenges. She called her own community efforts her “Saturday Morning Pancakes,” when she invited former students to sit around her kitchen table. She explained this “bright spot” of her last year:

Some [former students] might go to community college, some have graduated, some just come on Saturday mornings when they’re in town from breaks. A few former faculty, Like, now I have eight seats. I try and make sure that everybody has a seat around the table because I find that the conversations are really high quality.

While Ella’s invitees range from former students to former faculty, she made a crucial point when she said, “I try and make sure that everybody has a seat around the table.” This phrase resonated not only with her greater passion of “democracy” which she mentioned throughout the interview, but also because she found that “the conversations are really high quality.” The conversations and the community have kept her “sane” in a difficult year.

Previously, Ella described how she learned from her students that community college can be really “isolating,” so she would invite them to her house to give them a meal. Now, she has

invested, pre-planned, and has a freezer full of pancake mix. She explained how most recently she had several former students who were “regulars” while others were “backup people,” who said they “really want to come when there is an extra seat.” She explained the process of filling the seats around her table:

So the regulars get first dibs on eight seats, and then they claim those by Thursday, and then by Friday I open it up to the backup people who are like, “Hey, if you have an empty seat at Pancakes, I really want to come.” So we usually have a really good mix of people who have a single thread that ties them back to Lakewood High [pseudonym] but don’t necessarily even know each other or graduated with the same class. But it’s really funny, we kind of gather around, have a small talk, and then when we sit at the table we all start eating. The conversation starts, there’s one question that has to be answered by everyone and it’s, “What did you do last night?” And I know it sounds stupid but all it does is it gets people to talk about their lives, and usually what they did on a Friday night is somehow related to something much bigger.

Ella’s goal, as she said, was getting “people to talk about their lives,” and while these former students were not necessarily in the “same class,” she glowed as she explained she was the “single thread that ties them back” to their high school.

Continuing to create community was the goal of these pancake breakfasts, and she described how they “build supportive and sustaining relationships” through this shared time together:

So anyway, so really it’s just comments that get you rolling on other comments to get to know each other and build supportive and sustaining relationships. So yeah, I mean, that’s actually probably the most supportive, brightest spot of this semester because it’s really something to come together and we’ve been doing. . . .

Interestingly, as Ella and I talked about her Saturday morning pancakes and the “supportive and sustaining relationships,” Ella’s own daughters, who had been playing together in the next room, jumped into the conversation and asked about different former students by name, showing their own interest and investment in their mother’s students. To me, this conveyed truly how integrated Ella’s community—and family—were for her good life. Quickly, Ella also showed me

the special pancake mix in the freezer, and she said, “It’s Aunt Jemima Whole Wheat. Very hard to find. Whole wheat.” Then, she expressed how she had to start buying it in bulk, and “Well, that’s when I realized I need to start storing in the other freezer.” For her, the small financial investment in pancake mix was largely outweighed by the far more valuable relationships she cultivated with the flapjacks. She explained this sentiment:

I think that’s what pancakes are for me on Saturday morning, like kids who have found their interaction with me to be rewarding enough that on their own time they will seek my counsel or want to spend time. . . . And that’s a small encapsulation of what I think a great teaching career would be like, which is like you have an audience, you want to be of influence, if you are a teacher you want to be of influence in the world in some way, and for a while you’re there. . . . You have a captive audience. So to me the highest, most . . . greatest thing that happens is when you no longer have a captive audience and you’re still have an influence.

Ella’s emphasis was that this reciprocity of the “interaction” and relationship was “rewarding” for her. In addition to her *purpose* of managing and educating the students, the fact that these small communities of students “want to spend time” with her was an “encapsulation of . . . a great teaching career.” She later self-corrected her own word choice and said, “audience isn’t the right word” and explained:

And let’s change that word of “audience.” It’s not really audience because audience is about performance. It’s more about relationship, people who want to be in relationship with you and you’re going to learn something from, they’re going to learn something from you. And that’s why they come back. Nobody wants to be in an audience because . . . Yeah. Because it’s about being in a relationship with them. If I’ve somehow proven myself worthy of being in a relationship with them, then that’s a great, awesome outcome.

To prove that she was “worthy of being in a relationship with them” was (and is) the utmost importance and a “great, awesome outcome” for Ella. She had been the “Edutainer” in her beginning years, but through engaging in her Boards she realized that entertainment with an “audience” was not really teaching nor did it make her a real teacher. Over time, and now

beyond her 25th year of teaching, Ella was in awe that she had “somehow proven” to be worthy of their community and companionship.

Both Ella’s and Alice’s commitment to the students was an integral part of their own community and their *good life* of teaching. It also did not happen overnight, but their ability to cultivate these communities with intentionality took time. Ella, for example, showed that it was not just about her own “relationship” with the students that mattered, but also that she saw the way the students “come back” to be with each other and “build supportive and sustaining relationships” with other former students and former faculty. Additionally, Alice mentioned to me that even though she may come off as a “cold fish” to her students at first, they learn to see her authentic “empathy” for each of them. She explained:

I am not all touchy-feely. It’s just not who I am. But somehow or another, the kids grasp onto [my empathy] because I am so regimented and have these like, “You’re going to do this and this is how it’s going to be,” and I’m an equal-opportunity hater. It’s all of you. It’s not just one of you, it’s all of you.

This tough talk of being “an equal-opportunity hater” showed me that the community Alice formed was not a “touchy-feely” campfire singalong group like Ella’s pancake breakfast. Instead, she explained that her own experiences over the last years, had given her a new perspective on the humanness of her own self and her own students:

I think it just made me a little kinder in those situations to where if I took a kid outside and before I may have reigned him out or her out, I was just like, “What is the deal? Tell me. You tell me.” And so I became more of a listener than a teller.

Through reflecting on past circumstances and even observing other teachers, Alice “became more of a listener than a teller,” similar to Ella’s asking, “One question of ‘What did you do last night?’” I claim that Alice and Ella created community by creating a space for their students to tell their stories to each other and thus created a good life for themselves *and* their students.

In conclusion, I noticed that while all teachers ($n = 8$) discussed wanting their students to remember them, the youngest teachers, Chris and Danielle, emphasized the “joyfulness” (Chris) of their coming back and wanting to be able to re-connect with them “later in life” (Danielle). Similarly, teachers with 15-20 years of experience ($n = 4$) were already seeing students return more frequently into their life, and so described that as a highlight, even referring to them as “my babies” (Patricia and Leigh). The two teachers in this study with more than 20 years of experience also seemed, to me, to feel a disconnect with the students, but were motivated by this to find new and different ways of connecting. Finally, the important distinction for the two teachers in this study with the most years of experience (approximately 25 years) were the tangible ways Ella and Alice actualized lasting communities, not only for themselves but also for their students—new and old.

Ultimately, even for the teachers who saw retirement on the horizon, their emphasis on students as the essence of their *good life* was also how they saw their legacy. All of the teacher participants ($n = 8$) aspired to foster a sense of belonging and a lasting community with their students—both within their classrooms and beyond. I claim that the veteran teachers had learned their purpose was not only to connect with students for their own *good life of teaching* but also to inspire a good life with and for their students.

Chapter Summary

As a review of this Chapter V, I described how I learned that these eight teacher-leaders prized the importance of their *purpose* in cultivating relationships with their students and how this *passion* evolved through *practical wisdom* over time. To this point, Palmer (2007) explained that “good teachers” have the ability “to evoke in their students a “capacity for connectedness”” (par. 8). While I usually shy away from claiming someone is a static and consistent “good

teacher,” I believe Palmer made a point about those who live the *good life*, and in this case, the good life of teaching and leading.

In summary, from these eight teacher participants, I learned that their *purpose* shifted in an emphasis from *managing* the teacher-student relationships in the beginning years (n = 6), to *educating* students for perceivable growth during and beyond the National Board Certification years (n = 8), to *cultivating* community with the students more recently (n = 7). I also highlighted how I learned that the literature tended to explain that a positive teacher-student relationship is often discussed as crucial to student achievement (Hanushek, 2016; Stronge, Ward, Tucker, & Hindman, 2008; Zee & Koomen, 2016), and detrimental relationships in difficult contexts are explained as part of why teachers leave (Chang, 2009; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009b; Wyckoff, 2015). Yet from the participants in this study, I learned that the positive relationship between the teacher and the student is of utmost value to determining how teachers see themselves as flourishing—no matter the context.

In the next chapter, Chapter VI, I explain how the eight teacher-leaders described specific kinds of relationships with colleagues as integral to their flourishing as they enhanced their *passion* and *practical wisdom* in three categories of relationships: mentors (n = 7), support systems (n = 8), and instigators (n = 5).

Chapter VI

FINDINGS: RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER TEACHERS

AS FUNDAMENTAL TO FLOURISHING

While the eight teacher-leaders in this study described and understood cultivating relationships with students was a primary source of fulfillment ($n = 8$) for the good life of teaching, they also explained that their relationships with colleagues were fundamental to their flourishing in the beginning years teaching (1-3 years), in the National Board Certification process (after Year 4), and in the last academic year (2016-2017). In this chapter, I explain *how* each of these eight participants in Wake County Public Schools described and understood their relationships with colleagues as fundamental to flourishing, and I claim that these teacher-to-teacher relationships facilitated their *purpose* as mentors ($n = 7$), shared their *passion* and their development through support networks ($n = 8$), and even, over time, helped them redirect their leadership through interpersonal conflict ($n = 7$). In other words, I learned that all eight teacher-leader described their colleagues as integral to their growth and their flourishing through reflectively engaging and developing their *practical wisdom* over time ($n = 8$) in three categories: mentorships, support systems, and instigators ($n = 8$).

Based on my analyses of their descriptions of their relationships with their colleagues, I debated whether their collegial relationships were *encouragers* of their flourishing, as I asked in the second research question, or entangled with *how* they lived good lives or flourished, as I

asked in my first research question. Through thinking about their lived experiences combined with my own reflections on the literature, I decided that, across all eight participants, these teacher-to-teacher relationships were *how* they broadened and deepened their passions, fortified their purpose as educators, and discerned their own belonging over time. Thus, I discovered that this is how they embodied the good life of teaching. While educational leadership research has already shown that teachers *lead* through collegial relationships (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015; Lipsky, 1971; York-Barr & Duke, 2004) and that teacher job satisfaction is also positively correlated to strong relationships with other colleagues (Xia et al., 2015), the participants in this study explained that relationships with other teachers were fundamental to their flourishing. In other words, without other teachers, whom they respected and with whom they organically created close ties (n = 8), I claim that these teachers would not live the good life of teaching. In the next section, I give a bird's-eye view of the organization of this chapter before offering evidence and showing the fundamental value of teacher-to-teacher relationships for how these eight teachers understood their own flourishing.

Chapter Overview

Overall, I learned that the eight teacher-leaders described mentors (n = 7) and support systems (n = 8) as key relationships that mobilized their flourishing or captured the essence of the good life of teaching. By mentorship, I mean that these participants described the value of other adults who created “private, reciprocal” relationships that were “oriented to support growth” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 220) of the participants’ own *purpose*, *passion*, and *practical wisdom* as teachers and leaders. Importantly, finding mentors was important in the beginning years and through National Board Certification (n = 7), while being a mentor, or giving back to new teachers, was important and fundamental to flourishing for these teachers most recently

(n = 6). The majority of these participants (n = 6) explained that the more they gave, the more they received. I also highlight the one to two teachers whose experiences were discrepant.

Next, I explain the claim that support systems were integral to how all of these teachers understood the good life of teaching. By support systems, I mean that the participants described how finding groups of colleagues with whom they shared a common *purpose* and *passion* helped them feel a sense of belonging and connection—crucial to the good life of teaching. These support systems changed over time. Five participants saw school colleagues as the “family” they needed the first years of teaching to live the good life; then seven participants saw groups of colleagues as integral both to pursuing their purpose and passion of teaching and passing the National Board Certification. Additionally, I claim that support systems in the most recent year of teaching elevated their communal responsibility for creating a school culture of respect and belonging—for them and their students (n = 8). However, I talk about this finding more in Chapter VII as it also applies to *leadership* as a way of flourishing. While these support systems changed throughout their careers, the teachers explained that sharing their passions with others ultimately helped facilitate their own good life of teaching.

Finally, in the last section, I claim that most of these teachers (n = 7) described the importance of relationships—often with supervisors who were also teachers—as accelerating a drastic change in their career direction or their *purpose*. In two cases (Ella and Alice), however, these instigators were principals. I labeled these volatile teacher-to-teacher relationships as *instigators* because the interpersonal conflict that the seven teachers described either *enhanced* (n = 2) or *redirected* (n = 5) their purpose and passion as leaders. I also explain why some teachers did not experience instigators (n = 6, in the beginning years; n = 3, after National Board Certification) as discrepant experiences to this pattern that I uncovered.

In Table 14, I give a brief overview of the zoomed-out view of this chapter and the *importance* that these eight participants gave their collegial relationships as necessary to their own flourishing. As this table illustrates, the categories of relationships (i.e., mentorship, support systems, and instigators) were present at all three distinct points in their careers (left column), yet the way these teachers lived, understood, and valued the relationships with colleagues shifted over time. I show these changes in the columns labeled *mentorship*, *support systems*, and *instigators*. Importantly, I also highlight when teachers “did not mention” these relationships as vital to their flourishing. I explain these discrepant experiences in subsequent sections.

Table 14

Descriptive Overview of Teacher-to-Teacher Relationships

Point in Career	Mentorship	Support Systems	Instigators
Beginning years (1-3)	Modeled reflective practice for purpose, passion and practical wisdom (n = 7)	School as “family” for connection and passion (n = 5) Did not mention (n = 3)	Conflict with leadership <u>enhanced</u> purpose in teaching (n = 2, Patricia and Leigh) Did not mention (n = 6)
National Board Certification (> 4 years)	Did not mention (n = 1, Alice)	Friends enhance purpose in teaching through doing the boards together. (n = 7) Did not mention (n = 1, Patricia*) *Note: Chris and Saul mentioned but not as valuable	Conflict with leadership <u>redirects and refocuses</u> purpose in leadership (n = 6) Did not mention (n = 3, Danielle)
Last Academic Year (AY 2016 – 2017)	Paying it forward with new teachers as additional purpose (n = 6) Did not mention (n = 2, Danielle, Chris)	Working <i>with</i> colleagues shows reciprocity of support and elevate school culture (n = 8) (Please also see Chapter VII)	

In the next major section, I explain the importance of mentorship to these eight teacher-leaders as integral to their passion, purpose, and practical wisdom, or, in other words, living the good life of teaching—or flourishing.

Mentorship: The Power of One

In this section, I explain the importance of mentorship for these eight teacher-leaders based on their descriptions and understandings of their own flourishing. Mentorship is “private, reciprocal one[s] that are oriented to support growth” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 220), and research has shown that mentorship is especially important during the first several years of teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). As shown in Table 15, mentorship was especially important to seven of the eight teachers both during the first years *and* during the National Board Certification years. I combined these two data points, or benchmarks in time, because mentorship was fluid in those first years (0-8 years) as teachers pursued their National Board Certification. The exception to this claim in the beginning years and during National Board Certification was Alice’s experience. Alice, an English teacher with over 25 years of experience, was a veteran teacher so the idea of mentorship was not as abundantly discussed during her first years of teaching. From her perspective “in those days,” it just did not happen.

Interestingly, when I fast-forward to the most recent academic year (AY 2016-2017), which I asked about in the third interview, Alice was among the experienced teachers with more than 15 years of experience ($n = 6$) who emphasized the value of mentoring other teachers to their own purpose as leaders and the good life of teaching. The two teachers who did mention mentorship were Danielle, the ESL teacher, and Chris, a Math teacher, each of whom have 10 years of experience. Table 15 highlights their role as leaders of support systems and networks of reciprocal support rather than giving one-on-one mentorship.

Table 15

Overview of Mentorship Relationships

Point in Career	Description of Claim	Did Not Mention
Beginning years (1-3)	Mentorship modeled reflective practice for purpose, passion, and practical wisdom (n = 7)	(n = 1, Alice)
National Board Certification (> 4 years)		
Last Academic Year (AY 2016-2017)	Mentorship is now their own role with new teachers and adds purpose to their teaching (n = 6)	(n = 2, Danielle and Chris)

In sections that follow, I selected one or two key participants whose descriptions and understandings are representative of the other participants, and whose relationship with their mentor in their beginning years exemplified how much all seven participants valued this relationship relative to their flourishing and specifically guided their *purpose, passion, and practical wisdom*.

**The Beginning Years to National Boards:
Mentor as Role Model for Reflective Practice**

In the beginning years of teaching through to the time when these teachers were pursuing their National Board Certification (Years 0-8), seven teachers explained the fundamental role their mentors played in their own flourishing, specifically by helping them see their purpose, reflect (Brookfield, 2017) on their perseverance, and improve through their cultivation of practical wisdom.

Saul saw his value and purpose. Mentorship was especially notable in these seven teachers' interviews because they described how their mentor teachers were drastically different from their experiences with their cooperating teachers. Cooperating teachers lead and mentor aspiring teachers when they are still students and take college classes while they are teaching.

Saul, a 20-year English teacher whom I refer to as the Steady Problem Solver, described his cooperating teacher as “hands off” and “not in the best way,” but in the “oh-I-don’t-have-time-to-support-you hands-off” kind of way. The absenteeism of his first labeled mentor, or his cooperating teacher during his student-teaching experience, was a stark contrast to his official mentor during his first-year teaching whom he valued tremendously. He described his official mentor from his first-year teaching as follows:

I had a phenomenal mentor. Her name was Jerry [pseudonym]. She actually came to our wedding. And she was intuitive like I was and she would ask lots of questions about, “Tell me why you did that. What made that important for you to make that decision?” So she was never trying to redirect me overtly. She was asking lots of questions about, “Justify, why was that the right thing to do and would you have done it differently?” And now when I’m mentoring new teachers or anybody, that’s the way I approach them, “Why was it important for you to make that decision?” And I think people open up when you ask them what made that important for them versus, “Justify, why would you do that?” That’s not a very supportive environment.

Saul emphasized how his “phenomenal mentor” was “intuitive” and asked him “lots of questions” to help him think critically and “justify” his actions or explain “why it was important” for him to make specific decisions. These deeply reflective questions aided his own “inner-voice,” especially because, as he said, “It’s not that I don’t listen when people give me advice, but I’m much more likely to follow my inner voice when it comes to things like that than I am to just adopt someone else’s.” To be clear, Saul described his inner voice as an “inner confidence that what I’m doing is the right thing to do that really guides my professional behaviors, my personal behaviors.” From his own self-reflection and working with a mentor who helped facilitate his reflection, Saul explained how this *practical wisdom* (Halverson, 2004; Hustedde, 2015; MacIntyre, 2007) was an important value for him and for making it through the first years with “hope”:

I'm a very in-the-moment but also thinking forward. I'm constantly thinking forward. While we've been talking [during our last interview], I've been working on my lesson for next week. That's always happening with educators. So hopeful is probably an accurate way to say that, but not from the sense of that now isn't gratifying. It's just more of a I felt empowered, I guess might be the right word, because to feel empowered is "What am I learning from this moment that's going to make tomorrow and the next day more effective, more efficient and more worthwhile, more impactful for my students and my colleagues?"

For Saul to grow "more effective, more efficient, and more worthwhile, more impactful" for his students and colleagues, he used his "inner voice" to cultivate his practical wisdom and discernment for how to treat his students. This "empowerment" from his mentor helped him see his "impact" and cultivate his ability to reflect meaningfully on his classroom. Because of this mentorship, Saul was able to discern his value and meaning in how he was educating his students—which he deemed as his purpose in the good life of teaching.

Leigh learned to reflect on her passion and perseverance. Similar to Saul's experience with mentor who did not "redirect him overtly," Leigh—The Leader of Learning with about 15 years of experience as an English teacher, also complimented her mentor for helping her with "reflection" in her beginning years of teaching. Again, these two teachers, Saul and Leigh, exemplified the theme of how their relationship with their mentor refined their internal skills of reflection, which the other five (of seven total) participants expressed also. For example, Leigh's mentor "encouraged" her to "dig deeper" and feel "better" as a teacher—or see how and when intuitively she was fulfilling her purpose. As Leigh said, she had a few mentors and they:

helped me a lot with reflection. You were supposed to but I knew that a lot of mentors didn't make their mentees . . . and even as a mentor I haven't done that, we've done it more verbally, but for me especially what I needed to do was write weekly reflections and talk about what was good. And it got very tiresome but also it helped for grad school and it's definitely helped for national boards. But just being able to sit back and look, "Okay, what was good about this week? What was good and what did I do well this week? What didn't go as planned? How can I fix that?" And she would skim through the reflection, but she would also encourage me, my mentor would encourage me to dig deeper.

Leigh's mentor advised her to "write weekly reflections," which she often found "tiresome." Still, the mentor used it as a way to "encourage" Leigh that she was on the right track and to keep digging into her own experience to find the answers. Throughout her career and even during her pursuit of the National Board Certification, Leigh continued to seek mentors who could offer her this sort of insight. For example, Leigh had check-ins "with her department chair every day" who was right across the hall during her first years of teaching. This mentor helped her remember that as hard as it might be, "There's nothing that would make me happy like teaching does. There's nothing that would." Leigh explained that her mentors included her parents, both of whom were teachers. They helped her survive her toughest days and promised her "it is going to get better." Therefore, in addition to modeling self-reflection, Leigh's mentors also assured her that her perseverance or "resilience" (in Saul's words) would pay off. She explained this crucial reflection she had with her mentors:

Again, having my parents. I can't even . . . I would have quit if it hadn't been for those four people, my parents and my mentor and then my . . . the department chair. I would have because it really was just tough and all four of them just reinforced, "It's going to get better. I promise you it is going to get better. And you're going to make mistakes every day and you're going to have . . ." but they also were very truthful and said, "Not every day is going to be a good day. You have to understand that. It is not a movie where you walk in and the kids just love you and fall down at your feet, even your best kids." And that's true. Some of my best kids this morning were driving me nuts.

As Leigh explained, even some of her "best kids" drove her "nuts." As a result, she had to reflect on how her expectation of it being like "movies, where you walk in and the kids just love you" was not the reality. The *practical wisdom* the mentors offered Leigh and Saul helped them reflect and process the difference between their perception of the good life of teaching and reality of it.

Ella was "so duped" into doing better. Additionally, Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist and Humanities teacher with 25 years of experience, expressed her own love

of the “teacher-hero myth” and—like Leigh—remembered her mentors and how they were “brilliant” in that they “saw all of [her] flaws, but didn’t really call them out.”

Next, I describe how Ella not only grew in her *passion* and *purpose* of educating students because of her mentor, but also discovered her practical wisdom during our interview. For example, Ella offered a detailed account of how her “brilliant” and “informal mentor” helped her reflect:

She would never come make me feel bad about what I was doing. She would say . . . she would understand that I had some big ideas, but I needed to start pounding out the details. And this is a brilliant teacher who had been teaching for decades. She would come to me and say, “I really need you to help me with these lessons, and would you have any ideas?” and she would pull it out of me because I’m a verbal processor. I could figure out what I was going to do by talking to her about it, and she knew this. And so she was just brilliant at how she would get me to reflect by acting like she needed me. And I was duped. I was so duped. I was sure that I was the best thing that had ever happened to teaching and that I really could save her from her. You see what I’m saying? I totally bought this narrative that older teachers or veteran teachers needed me to shake things up and improve their teaching, which is hilarious now that I am one.

Ella explained that her mentors were “so subtle” in how they could make her “feel great and help [her] improve at the same time.” While she laughingly exclaimed “I was duped!” as she thought she “was the best thing that had ever happened to teaching,” she also realized in discussions with them that she was improving in her purpose to help students learn. The irony of her experience surprised Ella as she told the story. In recounting her mentor’s “brilliance,” she realized her own growth and practical wisdom. For instance, she said that in her first years of teaching, she had “totally bought this narrative that older teachers or veteran teachers needed me [a new teacher] to shake things up” especially when she said it was “hilarious now that I am one.”

Ella, with 25 years of experience teaching, was especially fascinating because right during our interview, she shared that she was working to “shake things up” through her ongoing activism at the state level. At the time of the interview, she was running a nonprofit that she had

founded to gather public-education stakeholders collectively to rally for more resources and support. To me, her current activism was juxtaposed with her quote about how new teachers think it is *their* job to “shake things up,” and she raised an interesting paradox since it was only now that she saw the “systemic issues” that need revisiting. She explained how she realized that a mentor’s role was to be a “subtle” guide to enthusiastic newbies while also advancing the profession overall. In this way, Ella exuded the practical wisdom her own mentor showed her during our interview. She explained how she was shaking things up—even more—as a veteran teacher than most new teachers do. By practical wisdom, I mean that Ella’s mentor not only helped her discern more deeply how to be a better teacher, but also encouraged her reflection and wisdom of how to be a better mentor—in the future—to other teachers and to the profession overall. Interestingly, while *practical wisdom* cannot be taught (Higgins, 2001), the practice of self-reflection as a teacher can be enhanced with others (Brookfield, 2017; Drago-Severson, 2013, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015; Kelly & Cherkowski, 2015).

Before I elaborate on the role reversal of these teachers going from mentee to mentor, I explain how mentorship did not exist for Alice in her first years as she was the only participant with a discrepant experience.

Alice had to “deal with it, figure it out.” The exception to my claim that mentors were most important and present during the beginning years and through to National Board Certification for seven of the eight teachers was Alice’s experience. More specifically, Alice, a 25-year veteran English teacher, described her mentor as “just absent.” For example, Alice explained that starting teaching over two decades ago was a different space: “And mentoring is very different today than it was then. There was no mentoring.” In fact, she explained that this is part of why she left her school after 3 years:

None whatsoever. There were no meetings. There was no anything. It was very much like what happens when you start teaching. Deal with it. Figure it out. And the sad thing is because like I said there were only a couple of new teachers, there should have been this wealth of information and support but there just wasn't. It was people who retired, wanted to get out and . . . and there also was not the culture of sharing of like, "Here's my folder. Take what you need out of this." It was, "Figure it out yourself."

Alice had to "figure it out" and despite being surrounded by veteran teachers with a "wealth of information," she just had to do it—or in her words, "deal with it"—herself. While a few teachers (n = 3, Ella, Molly, and Saul) who are also veterans did have informal mentors despite the lack of an intentional system for mentorship during that time, Alice had to seek out her own *support system* of colleagues and friends

Importantly, support systems often encompassed aspects of mentorship for teachers in my study. For this reason, I emphasize how most of the teachers (n = 7) described and understood support systems as crucial to living the good life during their National Board process as a separate category, which I describe next. In other words, while mentors were as important during the National Board Certification years as they were to these teachers in their first years, the teachers in this study named *multiple* mentors during the National Board process (n = 6). These multiple mentors made up reciprocal networks of support and feedback rather limiting their learning to one single and "private" relationship (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 220). Before I explain the importance of *support systems*, however, I describe how these teachers' value of mentorship flipped from receiving to giving—or paying it forward—in their most recent year(s) of teaching and living the good life.

Teaching and Leading Today: Mentoring Others

With strong mentors during their beginning years and National Board Certification years, six of the eight teachers described how they understood the good life of teaching as part of how they became mentors to others (n = 6). Specifically, I claim that these teachers understood their

role as a mentor teacher, either formally as cooperating teachers with aspiring teachers or student-teachers (n = 3) or as both formal and informal mentors to new teachers (n = 3), as integral to their own flourishing. In Table 16, I give an overview of this claim by showing the point in the participants' career which was the most recent academic year of their teaching before our interview (AY 2016-2017). It is worth noting also that all six of these teachers had been mentoring for at least 2 to 3 years prior (n = 6). Then, I describe the claim and show that two teachers—Danielle and Chris, who only have 10 years of experience—did not mention mentorship or paying it forward as important to their flourishing. Interestingly, both of them do mentor informally, but it is more in a network of friends and not prized as the central part of their own understanding of the good life of teaching.

Table 16

Overview of Mentorship Relationships in the Last Academic Year

Point in Career	Description of Claim	Did Not Mention
Last Academic Year (AY 2016-2017)	Mentorship as additional purpose to teaching—giving <i>is</i> receiving. (n = 6)	(n = 2, Danielle and Chris)

While six teachers mentioned mentoring as an important part of their leadership within the last academic year, as I show in Table 16, I first highlight Patricia's description of being a mentor because she was most emphatic about how mentoring new teachers illuminated her own flourishing. Then, I explain how Alice also explained the importance of mentorship to her living the good life of teaching through supporting the success of future teachers, as she experienced in the most recent academic year. Finally, I describe how Saul and Molly found informal ways to mentor because they described it as so important that time investment for them is "difficult" (Saul), although meaningful when they can do it.

Patricia's "pride" in paying it forward. Patricia, a 15-year veteran, became the mentor-coordinator within a year of the interview (2016-2017). She explained how she noticed her school had faced tremendous turnover: "It was unbelievable." As a result, she "was a part of the team that they picked to try to come up with some strategies and ways to better support teachers so that they didn't leave." As a leader at her school, Patricia explained that she felt it was part of her *purpose* and she felt "pride" and a sense of "accomplishment" in being asked to help her school figure out how to retain teachers. She explained that she "started a buddy system as part of that group that [she] still coordinates." She also described how her formal role includes informal mentoring:

I was a mentor teacher help at actually newcomers camp, and then that has evolved into now that I'm taking over that project. So I feel like over the years, the past few years in particular, that part especially has made a big difference, but I've also made connections with a lot of the new hires which has helped I think them see me more as a teacher leader throughout the years in terms of coming to me with questions or concerns, things like that.

As a "mentor teacher," Patricia not only had her own new teacher to support, but also helped establish a "newcomers camp" for teachers who are new to the school, even if they are veterans in the profession. Now, she said she noticed that other teachers have seen her "more as a teacher leader" over the years. For Patricia, helping new teachers learn from her own wisdom "excites" her, as she said:

I'm excited about working with the new teachers this year so that maybe I can help them find some of that balance because they shouldn't be at school at six o'clock. And there are some who are still out there at six o'clock, bless their little heart. It's like, come on, you can grade papers on your couch at home. Like, go home. Be somewhere different. And so, I don't know, maybe I can have a little bit of an influence there and maybe help them come up with some plans or structures or something so that they're not at school at six o'clock at night.

Being an "influence" and helping "new teachers" not only "excite" her, but also she is "just continuing to feel like that I'm a very important part of the community, I hope that that

continues.” Leading new teachers is a new passion and purpose of her teaching, and Patricia insisted that despite her leadership, she “always put[s] my classroom first.” This statement goes back to the first finding in Chapter V, in which Patricia explained how even though she took on more leadership, she still emphasized that her purpose is connecting with the kids. As she said: “And so whatever other responsibilities I take on I take them on with the understanding that my kids come first.” In reflection, Patricia pointed to mentorship as important because it helped her become part of the bigger school community; as she said, it is one of the “hallmarks” of a career in teaching:

I think in the big picture [being a teacher-leader is that] you can teach or discipline well regardless of what level you’re asked to teach, that you make yourself a part of your school’s community whether that is by assuming leadership roles, whether that is by working within your department maybe to improve instruction, maybe it’s that you pick up some extra-curriculars that you do, but I think that you integrate yourself that you are a part of that community. You’re a part that would be missed if you were gone. Those to me are the big hallmarks.

“Integrating” herself as the “mentor coordinator” and being a “part of the community” with her colleagues and leading them, in addition to her students, show how relating to her colleagues with purpose is important to Patricia, and this was echoed by the other participants in this study (n = 8). Specifically, the next section highlights a few other teachers who, especially within the last year of teaching (AY 2016-17), discussed the importance of mentorship to their own flourishing and feeling a part of a community with other adults who share their passion.

Alice’s “fabulous” experience advocating for student-teacher success. Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate who was a 25-year veteran English teacher, explained how her experience this last year as a “cooperating teacher . . . was fabulous.” Working with her student teacher “was extremely gratifying.” Alice had only been a student-teacher’s coordinating/mentor teacher once before, and over a decade before, which she said was a “terrible” experience, so this

was a risk for her that she only accepted this past year. Alice explained how great it was “to see her succeed so well.” In fact, she explained:

And I nominated her and wrote a recommendation for her to be the University student teacher of the year and she got it. So that was exciting, and we developed a really close relationship and I’m going to her wedding in two weeks. So that’s joyful, it really was, to develop a new relationship with someone young with new ideas and who needed me in a different way. I mean, she had such a great attitude about things. She did not come in at all like, “Well, you’re an old and you don’t know anything.” She was very much—even about technology, like, “I kind of want to do this but I don’t know how. How would you suggest it?” And so the two of us together created things and that was joyful.

Mentorship for Alice was “joyful” and “fabulous.” Specifically, she enjoyed developing “a new relationship with someone young with new ideas who needed her in a different way.” Since Alice tended to think of herself as a teacher who was not especially good at any one thing, this was a delightful experience for her to see her own passions mirrored in an up-and-coming teacher.

Next, I explain how I learned that Saul and Molly showed me how the time investment in being an official mentor makes informal mentoring or being a buddy their choice for leadership roles in order to continue their good life of teaching.

Saul and Molly mentor without “meetings every month.” The opportunity to pay-it-forward was very important to Saul. In fact, Saul, a 20-year English teacher veteran, already suggested that he “advised two student teachers in [his] career” and he “doesn’t do it more often because it’s very difficult. If you do it well, it’s very challenging and time-consuming to support someone.” Like Alice, Saul took mentorship extremely seriously and understood the investment it takes to add this *purpose* to the already-consuming act of teaching.

In addition, Molly, who was a 20-year veteran (like Saul) and taught Math, reaffirmed Saul and Alice’s dedication and explained that she is not a formal mentor because of the time. As Molly shared:

I've been asked to be a mentor numerous times. With the training that you have to go to, with the meetings every month. . . . And so I always tell them, I said, "I will be a buddy and unofficial mentor," and my administration's like, "Molly, I know you always take care," because they would always put some new young teachers across the hall from me. They bring someone with less than five years experience maybe, put them in here teaching pre-cal, for me so I could keep an eye on them, help them, answer questions.

Although Molly was "asked to be a mentor numerous times," her awareness of the tremendous time investment aligned with Saul and Alice's understanding that it takes a lot of effort to be a strong mentor. Molly, therefore, told her school that she would "be a buddy" and "informal mentor" to young teachers around her. Across almost all participants ($n = 7$), the idea of having a mentor close by in physical proximity was exceedingly important and mentioned as one way they learned as beginning teachers to navigate their classrooms and their schools. Molly's commitment to "keep an eye on [the younger teachers]" showed me that she saw her role to guide them as part of her leadership and her purpose, even though it was not formal with the "meetings every month" or added expectations.

In conclusion, according to these participants who articulated that they flourished in their beginning careers as they do today ($n = 8$), mentorship was important in the beginning years of teaching through to their National Board Certification years ($n = 7$), especially because it set the foundation of self-reflection for *practical wisdom* and helped teachers to see the value in their purpose and practice as teachers. Similarly, in their most recent year(s) of teaching, six of the participants explained that they found value in the *purpose* of carving out time, whenever they could, to mentor future teachers. The only teachers who mentioned that they did not mentor in any formal fashion were the younger teachers with 10 years of experience (Danielle and Chris), but I highlight them in the next section because they sought out support networks for reciprocal support of leadership and learning during their beginning years of teaching to most recently (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012, 2016).

In the next section, I explain the second category of relationships within my claim—namely that these eight teachers found teacher-to-teacher relationships as vital to their flourishing through creating support systems with other adults. These collegial friends were often like “family” (Molly) and shared their *passion* for the good life of teaching.

Support Systems: Teachers Are My Friends and My Family

In this section, I explain my claim that these eight teacher-leaders described how building friendships and “family” within their school were “support systems” (Alice) and fundamental to the good life of teaching, even though these support systems served different purposes over time.

To be clear, I claim that during their beginning years, six of the eight teachers ($n = 6$) referenced how they had support systems within their schools that they saw as their “family” ($n = 3$), as a group of outliers who stuck together and created belonging ($n = 3$), and sometimes as a cohort of friends who shared their passion ($n = 6$). The exceptions, Ella and Danielle, did not mention support systems. This was because Ella, I learned, was at a brand-new school for her first several years and the school itself was still struggling for coherence. Plus, Danielle, as an ESL teacher, changed schools almost every year in her first 4 years. She explained that she did not find a consistent support network until later.

Next, in their National Board Years, I explain my finding that the participants ($n = 7$) described how the lines blurred between mentors and support systems or friends. As a result, the reciprocity of sharing similar passions and helping colleagues pass the National Board Certification became increasingly valuable to how they understood their flourishing—especially since three of the seven did not pass their first time (i.e., Saul, Leigh, and Danielle).

Finally, I found that all the teachers ($n = 8$) understood support systems as critical to sustaining their passion and feeling belonging in the last academic year (2017-2018). However,

they explained that they no longer focused on *receiving* support from their colleagues but rather were all thinking about *sharing* responsibility for supporting students and creating a culture of belonging in the school overall. Therefore, they grew into *leaders* of these support systems. Thus, given this, I explain this finding in Chapter VII, that the push and pull of leadership as critical to flourishing—though it is also relevant here as one of the ways they described and understood connecting with colleagues.

In Table 17, I give a zoomed-out perspective of these findings by sharing the point of their career in the left column, and then in the next column, show the number of participants who found support systems to be of high importance to their flourishing. Finally, I show how two participants, Ella and Danielle in the beginning years and Patricia thereafter, did not mention their support systems as highly valuable or fundamental to their own flourishing at that time.

Table 17

Overview of Support Systems With Colleagues as Fundamental to Flourishing

Point in Career	Description of Claim	Did Not Mention
Beginning years (1-3)	Overall support system (n = 6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School colleagues as “family” (n=3, Molly, Saul, and Chris) - Outliers belong together (n=3, Alice, Saul, and Chris) - Friends feed passion (n = 5 Saul, Alice, Molly, Chris, Patricia, and Leigh) 	(n = 2, Ella and Danielle)
National Board Certification (> 4 years)	Overall support system (n = 7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Pushed them forward to self-improve (n = 4) -Believed in them and friendship helped them sustain their <i>passion</i> and <i>purpose</i> in teaching (n = 5) 	(n = 1, Patricia)
Last Academic Year (AY 2016-2017)	Working <i>with</i> colleagues shows reciprocal support. (n = 8)—Please see Chapter VII	NA

As I offer in Table 173, support systems were vital to flourishing for these participants in the early- and mid-career stages with only a few discrepant experiences, or participants whose experiences did not prize colleagues as supportive or available in their flourishing. I explain these participants explicitly in later sections after I first describe the participants who valued colleagues as vital to their own flourishing.

Interestingly, in the last academic year, though *all* participants mentioned support systems, they did not describe them as uniquely tied to how they saw their flourishing mobilized day to day. In other words, working with people within a variety of support systems was an irrefutable expectation—seen as normal and necessary to these eight participants—or, as I stated in the title, *fundamental* to their flourishing. Before I dive into the thick descriptions or lived experiences of vital support systems, I wish to highlight a surprise, which was that PLCs or Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) were rarely a source of support or flourishing for these participants.

Please No PLCs or PLTs

Contrary to most research promoting collaborative settings, while also not surprising to teachers who are currently or have ever been in contrived collaborative settings, the participants ($n = 8$) in this study did not mention PLCs as support systems to their flourishing (DuFour, 2011; Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2016; Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2015; Talbert, 2010). To be clear, while all the participants ($n = 8$) did mention that PLCs/PLTs existed, these eight teachers did not mention PLCs or PLTs as the source of their support systems.

PLCs, according to Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006), are structured spaces for “a group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way” (p. 223). In Wake

County, for example, these PLCs may be by grade level or content area, and district-wide they are required to meet weekly. In the last 10 years, all Wake County Public Schools, especially high schools, have been required by the district to create time and space for PLCs (personal experience and wcpss.net). In light of this being a district requirement, I offer that the absence of PLCs as a source of *support* is a finding in and of itself because the support systems the participants described in their interviews were formed organically rather than through predetermined structures within the school or district (n = 8). To this end, the participants implicitly emphasized the trust necessary to create these organic friendships, collegial “families,” and groups of support (Gray et al., 2016; Tschannen-Moran, 2014b; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2012), which I will highlight in each section.

Importantly, Ella, Alice, and Molly implicitly referred to trust as an expectation within their closest support systems. In response to learning about their lived experiences, I feel confident in drawing the conclusion that *trusting* support systems was not present within these participants’ PLCs/PLTs. Whether this is because they sought support elsewhere or were just mutually non-exclusive is not clear; however, I can claim that official district-created PLCs/PLTs were *not* critical for how they understood their own flourishing and continuing their passion for their job.

In the next section, I explain how seven teachers described and understood their organically crafted support systems as embodying their *passion* for connection and flourishing in their beginning years of teaching.

The Beginning Years: “They accepted me” and “Family is the best way to describe it”

I claim the family-like structures between colleagues influenced how six of the eight participants understood their passion for living the good life of teaching. To illustrate this claim,

I highlight the experiences of Molly—The Mother of Extremes who had 20 years of experience as a Math teacher, and who specifically showed the way colleagues-as-family helped her feel connected to pursue her passion of teaching. Next, I highlight the lived experience of Alice—the Audacious Actress/Advocate who had 25 years of experience as an English teacher and found a support group of other outliers. Then, I illuminate the experiences of the two males among the participants, Saul—the Steady Problem Solver and Chris—the Crusader for Kids because their experiences best honor how all six participants believed that their school friends fed their passion for the good life of teaching. Finally, I end this section with an explanation of why I believe Ella and Danielle had discrepant experiences their first years. In Table 18, I briefly review the three nuances within the overarching claim that support systems were vital to all six teachers in their first 3 years of teaching.

Table 18

Support Networks in the Beginning Years

Point in Career	Description of Claim	Did Not Mention
Beginning years (1-3)	Overall support system vital to connection (n = 6) - School colleagues as “family” (n = 3, Molly , Saul, and Chris) - Outliers belong together (n = 1, Alice , Saul, and Chris) - Friends feed passion (n = 3 Saul , Alice, Molly, and Chris)	(n = 2, Ella, Danielle)

First, I describe how school colleagues were like family, which Molly, Saul, and Chris all experienced, yet Molly most clearly explained they were fundamentally important to her flourishing in the beginning years of teaching.

School colleagues as family. While I learned that six participants experienced support systems overall during their beginning years of teaching, I found that Molly, Saul, and Chris all

described support-networks as being like “family” and they created connections that they recounted as critical to their flourishing in the beginning years. To best explain this claim, though, I will highlight Molly, the 20-year math teacher, as her meaning making evoked the clearest picture of how school colleagues can feel like family. Her expressions and sense making of this echoed what Saul and Chris shared as well.

First, Molly explained how her first school was “an amazing place to work” because “we were just . . . we had a really close group. It was a great family.” She admitted this was before she had too many outside obligations or, as she said, “Back then, I wasn’t married. I didn’t have children at home.” She described her active lifestyle then as “fun” and how she had the “freedom to be close,” referring to the closeness connections she had with her colleagues:

We did stuff outside of school. Like I said, the parties, going to games and stuff. . . . It was like after school I’ll go do this, I’ll go do that. And it’s definitely changed, but back then it was fun. It was that freedom to be close . . .

Molly’s support system of her colleagues did fun things together “outside of school,” and even though their activities were inclusive of “afterschool” events like “games,” they also planned activities together that were not school-related. She explained that they had a “Julie,” referencing a famous character from a TV show called *The Love Boat* who often planned the itinerary:

We just—there’s a Spanish teacher and we call her Julie. She’s our Julie, cruise director from the Love Boat, yeah. But she would always go and email me like, “Hey, let’s get together!” Because a lot of people started having babies and we had been so close. There’s a group of us, we always went to the teacher lounge and we ate lunch together. I was in the 300 building way on the other side, she the foreign languages or the 500 building, which is on the other side of the parking lot, and then there was like the Chorus teacher. So that was kind of the only time we would see each other. So it’s been fun to keep up those relationships and I actually got, when I was at my parents, I got a message on Facebook that my former department chair, she’s doing a Paper Chef. . . . We used to always have Paper Chef parties and Tupper-Ware parties. And I looked, I was like, “Oh!” and I can see . . . and there was like all these people that she invited. So it was a really great first experience and very hard to leave. But I knew that it wasn’t the same school. There are a few people that are still there. But it was very, very hard to go somewhere else.

Even though these teachers were not geographically close together in the school and not even in the same department, as Molly explained, they would go to the “teacher lounge and [eat] lunch together” and plan parties to see each other even when “a lot of people started having babies.” Using words like “it was really great” and expressing how “it was very, very hard to go somewhere else” evidenced to me how important these friends were to her good life of teaching and living well during those first years. Molly emphasized, too, that the collegiality was not just a random group of friends when she said:

Family is really the best way to describe it and it wasn’t just our department. We were very close with several other . . . and I love them, but they were like two assistant principals that when we had our parties they were there. They were included. It was just a great, fun place to work, fun people to work with.

The relationships Molly formed in her first 2 years of teaching created a “family” beyond her Math department and even included “two assistant principals.” Plus, Molly used the word “fun” about five different times, showing her recollection of joy, of her passion, and of her “love” for them as being vital to how fondly she remembered being a beginning teacher. As a brief reminder, passion in this dissertation is best framed through the engagement people sense in their work (Conway, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fredrickson, 2009; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). While these relationships primarily existed outside of the school and outside of the classroom, Molly explained how these connections made it “an amazing place to work.” She elaborated that:

I’m still close to a lot of those people. We get together maybe four times a year. There’s a group of us. We’re the old crew. A lot of them have retired. Some are stay-at-home moms. There are a couple of us that are teaching in different counties now, but we’ll get together and it’s really neat.

Her “close” relationships lasted, even though most of them did not just change schools but moved to different districts or even retired, yet they “still get together,” which she described as “really neat.”

Molly’s anecdotes highlighted the value of close, trusting friendships for her first years of teaching. As a brief reminder, Molly also characterized her first 3 years as a struggle for her professionally concerning classroom management, and she had to leave this school due to her husband’s job. In her second school out of state where she only stayed for a year, Molly described feeling like an “outsider” and was delighted to “return even as a ‘new teacher’” to her first school.

Outliers belong together. Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate, described feeling a little bit like an outsider in her first school, but found a “neat group” who which she could belong. Alice’s experience as an outsider or outlier was most robust in her descriptions, and I learned from her that “whereas there were not mentors,” there was a group of teachers who “saw that [she] was trying to do [her] best.” Even though she felt like an “outsider” teacher, as one of only a few new teachers in a school of veterans, she explained that the group she found “were kind of that counterculture hippie” group. Alice described her support system in greater detail:

Like one woman was gay, out, and still in 1992 that was not necessarily the norm. She taught shop. And then, my friend Rebecca [pseudonym], who taught business . . . was a devout Jewish person whose father was a rabbi. And there was this man [Mark], who took his wife’s name. And so these were all these different people that were not necessarily blue-collar [like our high school]. . . . And Dana [pseudonym] was the shop teacher and everybody knew she was out and talked about her partner and everything. So it was a neat group. . . . These were these three other people that were different than me—and we kind of formed this group and spent a lot of time together.

Because the norm type of teacher at Alice’s school, as she recalled, were “55-year-old White women,” she explained that she was, perhaps, the most normal as she herself was a White female, “but somehow they accepted me.” This group, she explained, were this “pocket of

people” who impacted her personally with her own belonging, but they also influenced her *passion* in her vocation to engage with “pockets of struggling students” and become a greater advocate for them. In her reflection of this support system’s influence on her, she also illuminated the *practical wisdom* she cultivated over the last 20 years, as she explained:

It made me realize that whereas I thought teaching was about me and what I delivered, as I saw these kids that I was not reaching I realized it was not about me at all. And it made me tunnel-vision in regard to, “Okay, I can do something, but it needs to be different than what I have done,” and I feel I went from these struggling schools with struggling students to . . . [a school now that] is not a struggling school but it has these pockets of struggling students, and I feel like that is where I found that I can be successful, because I was not being successful in those first three years. So this was, even though I didn’t come at it from that direction, I have found that’s what I’ve taken from those first three years.

The parallel of how Alice struggled in her first years and how she also saw her students as struggling showed me the way she aligned herself with her students and with the group of outsiders within her school of “counter cultural hippies.” Even though Alice explained how she taught at a more affluent school most recently, she explained that she figured out that teaching “was not about me at all.” Instead, teaching for her was about the “pockets of struggling students” and advocating for them—the way her colleagues advocated for her when they saw her “trying her best” and “failing miserably.” Alice’s experience with a support system gave her a sense of belonging just as Chris, Saul, and others found support systems organically that helped them continue to see their passion for teaching and themselves as meaningful.

Friends feed my passion. Although Alice’s support system of colleagues was not her age and did not teach her subject, they were her friends because “they spent a lot of time together.” Meanwhile, Saul—The Steady Problem Solver and Chris—The Crusader for Kids found friendship and support systems within their cohort of new teachers. Saul and Chris offered the most poignant experience of finding support systems in their beginning years that shared

their passion and how this was crucial to their good life of teaching, though this was true for all six participants. Saul explained, “There were quite a few young teachers when I got to [first school] and so being a part of that enclave was nice. I guess there were probably eleven or twelve of us who came in together.” For Saul, it was not only a hope but also an expectation to find friends within his school. He discussed how he found it “helpful” to find people “[his own] age to pal around with.” He expressed:

So that was good, and that was helpful to feel like you’ve got people your age to pal around with, go do things with, because I mean you’re new in town, you kind of need that, and we meet our friends based on work anyway, obviously, don’t we?

Saul explained that being “new in town” he “need[ed]” those friends and those connections, although he also reached out to “Teaching Fellow friends” at other schools to add to his support system. This was important for him when he moved schools 4 years later. While these were not his beginning years, he still found the “family” environment “important” or as he said:

I think being connected to people who were here, who had a shared vision of what public education could be, was really important. I found a core group of folks at [the new school] who were dedicated to helping me improve. We felt like a family, and I still feel that way about the folks I worked with when I first got to Wake County. There was a sense of accomplishment, a shared accomplishment, with that group of teachers that I worked with that was quite important to me.

Saul used the word “accomplishment” frequently—and I interpret this to mean that he was highlighting his feeling of flourishing. He also described that this “shared accomplishment” and “common vision” with others not only helped him “improve,” but also made it feel like “family” at his new school—echoing Molly’s assertion about her friends being like a “tight-knit family.” These teachers, for Saul, and as I explain next for Chris, shared his passion for students and for improving as teachers. Similarly, Chris, the Math teacher with 10 years, described how he had a strong cohort of beginning teachers at his school, too:

I had other friends that were beginning teachers that were all likeminded. I feel like I was lucky in that the class I came in with, they were all go-getters. I didn't feel like there were any people that were just there because they didn't know what else they wanted to do. So my colleagues were awesome, [and] my mentor was great. Our beginning teacher program coordinator at the time is now a really close friend. I hosted her retirement party. So yeah, leaning on other adults in the building. The guys I coached with were awesome.

Chris explained how his colleagues were “likeminded” and all “go-getters” who were there for a reason and a purpose, like him. Unlike other teachers, he described, who might only be there “because they didn't know what else they wanted to do,” Chris almost treated his multiple support systems like a long list of possible friends he could depend upon. For him, “leaning on other adults in the building” was important to him and “very affirming.” In fact, for Chris, the teachers he claimed to be closest with were also adding to their typical teaching load by being coaches. He explained:

The guys I coached with were just good friends more than anything else. I mean, we would talk about math. They were both math teachers, which was kind of fun. Mostly it was just fun to be friends with people that you worked with, like close friends, and we're still close friends now.

Like Molly and Saul, Chris talked about the “close friendships” as “fun” multiple times during our interviews. For him, even the fact that the coaches happened to be “math teachers” made it more “fun” for him because they “would talk about math.” Importantly, Chris mentioned his “mentor teacher” within this support group too and explained that he even “hosted a retirement party for her.”

This extra effort, to me, showed how Chris saw his support system, especially in their beginning years, as vital but also organic and self-directed since he was the one who intentionally developed the relationships over time. Interestingly, Chris's relationships happen to fall into the same lines (i.e., subject-matter) of typical PLCs (DuFour, 2011; DuFour & Eaker, 2005) and could have resided within the explicit efforts of the Beginning Teacher programs in

Wake County. However, Chris did not talk about the value of PLC meetings or the intentional crafting of those spaces. Instead, he emphasized that these teachers and “close friends” evidenced a similar *passion* of engaging with students and were “like-minded” and “fun” colleagues outside of school whom he accepted and who accepted him as friends.

Implicitly, these participants (n = 7) showed the value of collegial trust and resonated with international research that described “harmonious passion” as “passionate activity [that] is freely chosen, interacts harmoniously with various aspects of life, is perceived under the control of the person” (Moè, 2016, p. 432). According to Moè, “harmonious passion” positively correlates with job satisfaction. In this case, these teacher participants described that finding other teachers to share their “harmonious passion” (p. 432) was part of how they described and understood their own good life of teaching in their beginning years of their career.

Next, I briefly explain the discrepant experiences of Ella and Danielle, who still found a series of vital relationships during their beginning years but did not coalesce into reciprocal friendships or support systems.

Support from esteemed leaders. Ella, a 25-year veteran Humanities teacher, and Danielle, a 10-year veteran ESL teacher, did not mention a network of friends within their schools as integral to their flourishing within the first years of teaching. Instead, for them, having adult(s) in leadership positions who held them to high standards was most supportive to how they saw themselves living the good life of teaching.

Based on Ella’s descriptions of her first years, I believe her lack of a system of support was because she was at a brand new high school. Her memory of her colleagues during those first years was that they were all “cobbled” together from different schools under a principal with “a lot of vision.” As she remembered:

We had a really, as you can imagine, when you open a large comprehensive high school in Wake County, the principal is a pretty important choice, and they picked a very strong leader who had a lot of vision. He also held his teachers to very high standards. Our first faculty meeting he had us all stood up and he said, “Be good or be gone.” That was an impressive moment for all of us, like, “Oh, you better hold each other to high standards.” There was a whole lot of stuff in that first year to establish like . . . and pulling faculty from all the other high schools and trying to cobble together the best practices and traditions that each of those other high schools did into a unique combination for us. We had to be really thoughtful about what we were doing and why we were doing it that way and just a very hectic first year but full of a lot of opportunity and excitement at the same time.

As a “new teacher,” Ella remembered the “strong leader” and the way he encouraged the teachers to “hold each other to high standards” as they tried to figure out “best practices and traditions” that they wanted to imbue into this new school.

On the other hand, Danielle shared that she changed schools *every year* during her first 3 years due to the volatile federal funding for ESL teachers based on per-pupil expenditures. As a result, my understanding was that she never really had time to form strong bonds with other teachers. Instead, however, she had multiple different mentors in each district where she worked. For example, at her first school in one district, she recalled that:

We had a coach that would visit all the first-year-teacher classrooms and she observed me and she was like, “That was not really good. . . . And you’re not that bad.” Because I really wanted to do a good job.

This coach helped her to pay attention to her students versus just “running through the lesson,” which was feedback that stung. Ultimately, as Danielle said, it helped her and felt supportive to her own teaching. She then went to a different school district the following year and had “one full-time person in the school and his only job was to be the mentor or ‘the’ mentor at that school,” which she thought was great too.

Therefore, even though Danielle and Ella did not have support systems made up of friends and colleagues their first years, they did have adults around them whom they respected

and inspired them to “do a good job” (Danielle) or reach for “high standards” (Ella). These advocates helped them develop their passion and purpose as teachers and were brief connections to leaders they respected, which they believed help them flourish. As a result, it seemed to me that a timeframe of at least 3 years was a necessary time for these teachers to build connections. While this learning is not generalizable beyond this sample, Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) described a safe feeling in collaborative cultures with the metaphor of a “slow-boiling pot” rather than “pressure cookers” (p. 114), which I think these participants illuminated through this discrepancy.

In the next section, I explain the increasing value and presence of self-selected support systems for seven of the eight teachers in this study as they pursued their National Board Certification and renewal. The next section spans the time from when these teachers earned their National Board Certification (around Year 4) through to some of their Renewal process (10 years later), and, finally, to the support systems they cultivated as recently as the last academic year (2016-2017).

From National Board Certification to Today: From Self-Support to Mutual Friendship

In this section, I claim that seven of the eight teachers experienced the good life of teaching during their National Board Certification (after 4 years) through support systems of colleagues who encouraged their passion for teaching and the good life. Specifically, I found that five of the participants explained that support systems helped them endure the challenging process and remember their purpose and passion in teaching ($n = 5$). Interestingly, I also learned that for three of the teacher participants, support systems introduced them or encouraged them to do the Boards ($n = 3$) but were foundational supports *during* the process.

To be specific and offer a zoomed-out overview, I crafted Table 19 to sum up this claim. For example, I show that seven participants explained their support system either added moral support when these teachers faced failure (Leigh and Danielle) or personal struggles (Ella) while pursuing this national accolade or pushed them to embark on this journey as an affirmation of their teaching (n = 3, Molly, Chris, and Saul). Then, I show how I learned that Patricia expressed little to no emphasis on their support system during her entire process. Importantly, I also point out that Saul, Chris, and Patricia explained their actual process was very self-directed and “solitary” (Saul). Interestingly, even though Chris and Saul were both encouraged by colleagues to complete the process at first, Chris, Saul, and Patricia completed their Boards solo with minimal support from outside systems or colleagues.

Table 19

Support Networks in the National Board Certification Years

Point in Career	Description of Claim	Did Not Mention
National Board Certification (> 4 years)	Overall support system (n = 7) Friends enhance purpose in teaching through doing the boards together. (n = 5, Alice, Leigh, Danielle, and Ella) Pushed them forward (n = 3, Molly, Chris,* and Saul*)	(n = 1, Patricia (Exceptions Chris* and Saul*))

As a brief reminder, the majority of teachers (n = 7) mentioned some version of a support system from their colleagues at the point of their career when they earned their National Boards. I also put an asterisk near Chris and Saul because they explained that other colleagues encouraged and pushed them to do the Boards, but they most pursued the process alone. Before I discuss these findings in detail, I briefly review the National Board process at present and review each participant’s experience to offer context to his or her experience of a support system.

The National Board process overall and individual contexts. As a brief reminder, the National Board process is only possible for teachers to attempt after they have taught 3 to 4 full years. Additionally, in the state of North Carolina, passing the boards gives teachers a 12% pay raise. The National Board process requires six individual reflective essays and two videos of their teaching—one whole group video and one small group video. There is also a subject matter exam that each participant has to take. The directions are highly precise and less than 3% of the nation's teachers have earned their certification (Extrom, 2011). It is important to note that although the process itself is uniform, the path for each participant varied widely.

Therefore, in Table 20, I show the timeline and process of earning the National Board Certification for each participant. To do so, I use color-shading to show how much support each teacher had at different stages: light grey means minimal to no support and dark grey means the participant described the value of their support system as integral to his or her flourishing. I also show that three of the eight teacher-leaders told me they did not pass the first time. Then, I show how I learned that half of the participants ($n = 4$) have since renewed their Boards because they passed the 10-year mark from the first time they earned their Boards.

Importantly, while six of the participants explained that support systems imbued them as beginning teachers with *passion* and “fun” (Chris and Molly) for their flourishing, seven teachers described how support systems added *purpose* and *meaning* for their own flourishing during the National Board Certification years ($n = 7$). In Table 20, I convey how Patricia and Chris expressed that they had little to no support throughout their Board and passed without a problem. Meanwhile Saul, too, did not seek out support and, though he did not pass his first time, he was able to pass the second time. Saul is a strong contrast to Danielle and Leigh who responded to the “failure” by increasing their support systems on the second try. Last, Molly, Alice, and Ella

passed the boards their first time and also explained the integral value of the friends and support systems during the process.

Table 20

Route to the National Board Certification and Level of Support

Participant	First Attempt (after 4 years)	Second Attempt (within 1 year)	Renewal (10 years later)
Patricia	Passed	NA	Passed
Chris	Passed	NA	NA
Saul	Did Not Pass	Passed	NA
Danielle	Did Not Pass	Passed	NA
Leigh	Did Not Pass	Passed	NA
Molly	Passed	NA	Passed
Alice	Passed	NA	Passed
Ella	Passed	NA	Passed

Note: Light grey means little to no support and dark grey means highly valued support

Again, my goal in Table 20 was to show how much, or how little, each person valued his or her support systems relative to flourishing *during* the process of earning the Boards or pursuing the Renewal. In the next section, my aim is to give voice to the lived experiences of how five participants, specifically, understood their friendships as integral to their purpose of teaching and the good life.

Friends as Support Systems Enhance Purpose

In this section, I explain how the majority of teachers in this study (n = 5) described their support systems, or other colleagues, as sharing their passion and enhancing their *purpose* and meaning in their teaching as they pursued their Boards, which was an important thread to flourishing. While they all sought out colleagues for support, Danielle—The Defender of Intellect and Leigh—The Leader of Learning explained that they did not pass the first time—like Saul—and so they depended more heavily on colleagues during their second attempt.

Meanwhile, Molly, Alice, and Ella, who were among the first to even do the National Board Certification in the 1980s, accomplished both their National Boards and the Renewal process, which is required 10 years later. Therefore, I first describe Molly who had no intention of earning her Boards until her colleague, department chair, and best friend “made” her do it. I highlight her first as she best captured the meaningful support system for the other five participants.

“We’re all going to get through it together.” First, the experience of Molly—The Mother of Extremes and a 20-year veteran Math teacher, was similar to Saul and Chris in that she was encouraged to do her Boards by her colleagues. As she explained:

Well, it was mostly my department chair, who was a good friend of mine. She was going to do it and she came and said, “Come on, do it with us.” In our last interview I had talked about my friend, my . . . Teaching Fellow friend from University. We were working together at the time, so the three of us went through the process together.

Molly’s support system of “good friends” made all the difference in her seeing herself as an accomplished teacher or, as she said, “I think that part was very helpful for me just to kind of reassure myself that the choices I had made were for the best.” While this process not only reassured her in her teaching, she explained the importance of the “trust” between her and her colleague:

And she’d say, when we pass, we’re going to make more money. And so, I really credit her to making me do it because I was probably too young at the time to realize the benefits of it. . . . I really credit her to . . . I don’t think I knew enough about it to even entertain the idea of doing it. It was pretty much her saying, “You’re doing this,” and I trusted her, and she’s the one that made me start teaching Integrated Math. I just had a lot of respect, so. She kind of twisted my arm, but also, “We’re all going to do it together. We’re all going to get through it together.” And I was like, “Okay!” So we just jumped in and did it.

Molly described how her support system “twisted [her] arm” to tell her “we’re all going to do it together” and that without them, she would not have even “entertained the idea of doing it.” I

wish to emphasize how often Molly said the word “together.” This is important because the reciprocity of helping each other became abundantly important for several teachers (n = 4) during this process.

Similar to Molly’s need and support from her mentor and an additional support system of friends, Danielle—The Defender of Intellect depended on a woman who was both a mentor and a friend. Danielle explained her support system:

Yeah. So she’s a woman named Sally [pseudonym] and she’s a veteran teacher at [another school] and, yeah, I like her sense of humor. She’s very dry and would kind of like poke fun at the [Boards], she liked to use the word “edgy jargon” and make fun of all the little . . . the terms and stuff that comes with her guidelines. They give you that huge glossary. And we would just talk, share experience at our different schools. So yeah, I came to look forward to seeing her. I think it was mutual. So we had like a little friendship going and, yeah, that was really supportive.

Even though Sally was the experienced or “veteran” teacher, Danielle emphasized the “friendship” and “mutual” enjoyment they had that “was really supportive.”

I learned from Danielle that her value of friendship and ability to find colleagues who supported her commitment to teaching was how she experienced her own flourishing during her National Board Certification. Next, I describe how Ella and Alice’s descriptions of their National Board process with their support systems best capture how the friendship also helped them “survive” and maybe even “enjoy” the “stressful” process of National Board Certification.

“You can do this. You got this.” Ella and Alice, the two most veteran teachers in this study with about 25 years of experience, both relied on their “support system” during their first National Board Certification process and also during their renewal process to feel as though they were part of a “community.” For example, Alice described how “three of us” at her school “became a core group of readers for each other” and would set aside time on the weekends, or as she explained:

We would set aside in our calendars, “Okay, from 10 to three the three of us are going to the library across town where we know no one and we would nonstop work and hold each other to it.” So that was beneficial in terms of kind of creating that community and that support system.

Alice explained to me that the “community” she created during this time were “three people [she] is still close to even though one of them no longer works at Lakewood. The other one is one of my best friends, and it all came from that time-frame.” While Alice did not explicitly say she and her support community shared a common passion or purpose, their process of setting aside 5 hours every weekend showed me they were all willing to work towards a common goal that was improving their practice. Alice explained how much she “enjoy[ed] it” not only due to the community but also:

even at an analytical level I enjoy it. And I felt like for the last several years all I had been doing was teaching, not necessarily self-reflecting and writing, and that forced me into that situation to do something that I enjoyed and was relatively decent at. So I found it satisfying almost as much as on a personal level as on a professional level.

Alice reflected that the “professional level” of honing her practice and no longer only teaching writing but also “self-reflecting and writing” helped her find the process “satisfying” overall. Highlighting the synthesis of being with friends who share a common purpose, Alice’s experience was the thread of flourishing that stood out to me from these participants (n = 5) during the National Board process.

Similarly, when Ella described her National Board process, she emphasized both the support she gathered from her community and the joy of sharing her teaching with others. First, she explained the “psychological support” from her friends (Jessica and Sam, pseudonyms). More specifically, when she had to take the National Board Assessment for her content area, she described it as “a test on the history of the world:”

Well, I really had a lot of psychological support. For example, I think about [Jessica] and [Sam], they just really were very encouraging. And then also, I mean looking back on

it, my department members here at school were actually worried about me. You know what I mean? Like, “Is she okay?” Like, “I bet she’s about to lose her mind.” So they were just so sweet. I remember the morning when I left my house to take the assessment. They had left a big basket on my porch that had snack foods and a coffee mug that they had gone to the pottery painting studio and they had painted it, like painted it, like people showed up, like the product showed that people had gone and dropped by in a pottery studio and painted this mug, and then had the forethought to do that and then get it glazed and fired and then have it put in this gift basket. [Laughs] Like, “Whoa! This is a collective effort.” I still have that coffee mug. It’s like one of the most touching things I’ve ever received in my life where they just were so encouraging, like, “You can do this and you got this.” And that was really important. I didn’t feel so alone.

As shown above, Ella recounted how her close friends and her entire department gave her “one of the most touching things” she had ever received as a sign of support, and how their encouragement was “really important” so that she did not “feel so alone.” She revisited the idea of being alone during this process because she described how “isolating” teaching normally is. As a result, I learned that she viewed the Board process as especially “exciting” because, as she explained:

I’m always excited to talk about teaching because this profession is so isolating. And everybody kind of like created their own masterpiece and they’re so wrapped up in their masterpiece that they don’t really have time to really admire anyone else’s masterpiece, so I always enjoy National Boards because it’s me talking about what I love to do in a very detailed, precise manner. Yeah, so I mean, as painful as a process was, I knew I could spin a good narrative about what I was doing and why I was doing it. And especially the second time around, that was really fun, because I’m proud, you know? I’m proud of what I do and why I do it and what I come up with, and I think that it’s nice to actually tell someone, because so rarely does anybody ever see it except the kids and they don’t really appreciate it because you’re making them do work.

Synthesizing the value of her community with the need for her to share her work with others who “appreciate it,” Ella said she was “proud of what I do and why I do it and what I come up with.”

These feelings of sharing her passions with others helped alleviate part of the “painful” aspects of the process. Still, she described classrooms as “masterpieces[s]” and that the Boards gave her and others the opportunity to “admire” the work of others. Importantly, Ella was also

going through a divorce while she earned her National Boards, but discussed how the process was “a really good distraction,” or as she elaborated:

[The divorce] felt really heavy. It just felt like I was carrying around a three hundred pound bowling ball all the time. [Laughs] But at the same time, it was a really good distraction, you know? Like, yeah, kind of the functional dysfunction that was going on.

Because Ella was going through a personal struggle on top of completing her Boards, the “psychological support” from being with others who were also focused on their “masterpieces” of teaching made her “excited” during (and perhaps in spite of) her “heavy” divorce. Alice and Ella both renewed 10 years later, and they explained that their Renewal process revealed to them how much they had deepened their practical wisdom for their own flourishing.

In summary, these five teacher-leader participants showed that despite of the National Board process being a relatively demanding and stressful process, the support systems and sharing a common purpose for teaching were integrated into the “fulfillment” (Saul), “satisfaction” (Alice), and “joy” (Molly) they described experiencing during their Boards. In the next section, I explain the three participants (Patricia, Chris and Saul) whose experience with support systems pushed them forward to pursue National Board Certification. Interestingly, they decided to finish the process alone—each for his or her own reasons, which I describe next.

Support Systems Available But Not Critical

While five participants described their colleagues and friends as integral to their surviving and finding fulfillment in the National Board process, three participants (Chris, Saul, and Patricia) had different experiences with their colleagues. To start, I describe the account of Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue as she experienced her first National Boards. It was a unique year for her as a teacher because it was her first—and last—year at a new school in Wake County. For her, the process was completely solitary. Chris—The Crusader for Kids and Saul—

The Steady Problem Solver were inspired by their colleagues, but then went through the process mostly by themselves.

“I was going to do it.” First, Patricia was not entirely by herself through the National Board process because she did have one teacher who “had just done [her Boards] the year before.” However, while Patricia explained that “she was really helpful. If I had a question, she was able to answer it pretty quickly since she had just done it herself,” she did not emphasize her support. Still, unlike the rest of the teachers in this study, Patricia did not state that her colleagues were integral to her passion or her flourishing in the way the other participants described the meaning/purpose imbued in the reflective process of the Boards. Instead, Patricia explained “she was in a good place” and “enjoyed” the National Board process itself and on her own. This may be, in part, because the year Patricia completed her Boards was the same year she moved to a new school because she “could not afford” the house she was renting in her hometown. As soon as she found a job at a new school through the “Wake County Job Fair,” she moved to Wake County; she explained that going for her Boards was just “the next step.” She elaborated:

I mean, for me it was just the next step. Like I knew I was going to do it as soon as I was eligible to do it. So as soon as I was done with my third full year, then I just knew that was the next thing I was going to do.

Again, Patricia “was done with her third full year,” which is the only requirement to pursue National Board Certification—plus, as she mentioned, she had one colleague who had just completed it. For her, going through the process was “very detailed, which again is something” she explained she already was. As a result, she said, “I didn’t feel like, again, that it was pushing me to be super out of the ordinary.”

To complete the process, Patricia used her own resources such as finding “a little paper booklet” for her subject area and explained, “If you actually read through the instructions, they

basically tell you how to do it. And so I just kind of treated that like a checklist and went through it.” Overall, Patricia described the process itself as more fulfilling than any of her connections with colleagues at that time. While she did have a former principal whom she considered a close friend, this person was not integral to her own self-improvement other than being a knowing voice and cheerleader on the sidelines. Instead, she emphasized that she “enjoyed the tests” and “felt really good about the assessment, so at that point I felt like I was in a pretty good place.” To be clear, Patricia emphasized her value and passion for the process when she said over and over again, “I enjoyed it. I felt like I learned a lot. It was very reflective.” Similarly, since Patricia was one of four participants who also did her Renewal 10 years later, she described the process in terms of her “growth” more than anything and explained:

So I didn’t feel like it was really stressful at all. It probably should have been more stressful than it was. . . . It really was not. I honestly did most of the work in like a day and a half, if I’m honest.

Patricia repeated that “the reflective piece has just become a big part of what I do,” so the Renewal for the Boards was not stressful—she said. Even though she had to pay the \$1,250 out of pocket because the State was not covering the application cost anymore, she explained “I knew in three or four paychecks that would pay itself back.” Overall, Patricia’s perspective of the Boards emphasized her own growth and practical wisdom as an improving teacher. This is why her experience somewhat differed from those of the other participants overall ($n = 8$) during their National Board process.

“Didn’t want anyone in my business.” Unlike Patricia, Chris and Saul did not embark on earning their Boards as a natural next step. Instead, they described the importance of their colleagues as pushing them to “improve themselves” (Saul). For example, Chris explained that “it was recommended to me by an assistant principal” and he realized he had a lot of “go-to”

people around him who had just finished their Boards whom he could “reach out to if [he] needed.” In fact, Chris recalled that he did not do it the first year he was eligible because he was “coaching,” but that his assistant principal told him, “Quit stalling, you need to do this” and he realized he would “always be busy.” Interestingly, Chris’s experience was similar to Patricia’s in that he did the process entirely by himself. In fact, Chris “kept it a secret from all [his] colleagues that [he] was going through the [National Board] process.” Like Patricia, he explained that he “read the directions thoroughly and felt like [he] had [his] head wrapped around the requirements.” When I asked follow-up questions during the interview to understand why he made that choice, he admitted that it was “unusual” to do it completely alone, but that he “didn’t really want to go through the process with anybody else” nor did he “want people in [his] business.” While this solitary inclination diverged from how Chris explained he wanted “one hundred percent involvement in his community,” this choice showed that he valued the Boards for the “reflective process,” just like Patricia. He said, “It was actually pretty cool to think critically about like what I was doing in the classroom every day and to have to analyze what students were turning in.” Even though his department chair encouraged him to go for it initially, Chris was very clear that the process of the Boards itself was integral to his flourishing and embracing the good life of the teacher rather than the connection with colleagues.

“It was a solitary experience.” Contrasting with Chris and Patricia’s experiences somewhat, Saul did not pass the Boards the first time, so he went through the process twice and had two relatively different experiences each time. Like Chris, Saul was encouraged to embark on the process by a NCTF colleague from another school, or as he reflected:

We were actually teaching fellows together. . . . Yeah, so we have stayed in touch ever since and, yeah, he was kind of like, “Oh, let’s do this! This is something that teachers do to improve themselves and the pay differential would be good. It’d be worth our time and energy.” So that’s what we did.

Saul was on the Boards with this same colleague and thought it would be worthwhile to “do it every other weekend and [so they] worked on an increase.” Unlike his NCTF colleague, however, Saul “did not pass the first time.” He elaborated on the disappointment:

Unfortunately, it was quite disappointing. You put in a year’s worth of work, you’ve written it with someone who’s given you feedback and then he passed and I did not, so that was definitely a difficult thing because he could not really take any joy in his accomplishment, right? [Chuckles]

Emphasizing the difficulties for him were both not seeing the rewards from “a year’s worth of work” and realizing that his friend “could not really take any joy in his accomplishment,” Saul explained how not passing the Boards caused him “to become really self-reflective.” As a result, Saul described that “the second time around,” he decided to do “by himself.” He expanded on his decision:

It was really a solitary experience because honestly, I was trying to recover from having failed and getting feedback from people who would ask too many questions about, “Well, what happened here?” But once you kind of get past that part, it’s really a growth experience and someone’s false perception of your teaching ability, whatever that means. Then it became a whole lot easier to actually engage what I needed to do, which was look inward and identify where I wasn’t meeting standards, where I was making mistakes, and what level of influence I could exert on the learning situation and student outcomes.

In many ways, Saul was inspired by the depth of reflection and the solitary nature of reflecting on his “teaching ability” as he “look[ed] inward and identif[ied] where [he] wasn’t meeting the standards and where [he] was making mistakes.” Saul also described the first influences on his choice to embark on this process as integral to his relationship with the other NCTF with whom he “keeps in touch to this day,” just like Chris was pushed to “quit stalling” by his assistant principal and department chair from the beginning. While these two people were supports as they launched and pushed them forward, Chris and Saul—like Patricia—used the Board process to enhance their own passion and wisdom in teaching rather than depending on colleagues to be with them in the good life at this time.

In conclusion, the teachers who encouraged Saul and Chris to do their National Boards—and helped Patricia with her questions—were not formal mentors or even teachers at their own school. However, Chris and Saul explained their engagement and investment in their careers as the implicit reason they committed to the year-long process and felt they flourished—even in the solitary nature of the experience. Additionally, flourishing, as described by all these participants ($n = 8$) and in the literature, included “reflection” (Brookfield, 2017), which I describe as necessary for practical wisdom. For example, Saul explained how the process felt like an “action-based research project” where “applicability of the work would be directly related to student achievement. So I thought that was the best option, growth option for me as well.” As I mentioned in Chapter II and V, reflections on field experience that ties to growth in practice are integral to practical wisdom—one of the three main threads of flourishing.

In the next section, I describe the claim that instigators were a third category that the participants in this study described as foundational to their own flourishing. By instigators, I mean people who promoted change for the teachers through conflict. Unlike mentors and support systems, which I learned were present for the all of participants ($n = 8$) at various points in their careers, instigators were only mentioned by six participants—each at only one point in their career ($n = 7$). Still, for those who had instigators, they were often leaders or direct supervisors who were important in each teacher’s narrative of his or her own flourishing, as I explain next.

Instigators: Look What You Made Me Do

In this section, I describe how teacher-to-teacher relationships were not only important to these eight teacher-leaders in positive mentorships or support systems relative to their own flourishing, but also important relative to relationships with leadership that I call instigators

(n = 7). Based on the descriptions from the teachers, I claim that instigators are people within a participant's school who promoted an individual to change through interpersonal conflict.

I derived the subtitle from a Taylor Swift song titled "Look What You Made Me Do" because in her latest album *Reputation* (2017), Swift (a pop country artist) described herself as a better, reinvented version due to her need to respond to outside conflicts. To me, Swift's positive self-affirmation and redirection of her music is an exemplary instance of how she used conflict constructively. According to conflict researchers Follett et al. (1942), Johnson and Johnson (2016), Uline, Tschannen-Moran, and Perez (2003), and one of the most notable theorists Deutsch (1994), "conflict can either be constructive or destructive." In this subsection, I show how the teachers (n = 7) responded to instigators of conflict as contributing to their own flourishing as they *constructively* influenced their own purpose in their teaching. At the end of this section, I will explain how I learned about how Danielle—The Defender of Intellect did not mention an instigator, although she has in fact experienced conflict.

Importantly, I also claim that the instigators were not discouragers or necessarily encouragers to their own flourishing, as I asked in my second and third research questions. Instead, from my analysis of the participants' perspectives, the relationships with instigators were connected and integrated into how the teachers made meaning or described their own flourishing. To be specific, I learned that the instigators were all leaders, such as department chairs, assistant principals, or principals, and that these direct supervisors *enhanced* the participants' purpose in teaching (n = 3) in the beginning years (1-3) and *redirected* and/or *refocused* the participants' purpose and career trajectory (n = 4) after their National Board Certification and up until the last academic year. In Table 21, I explain how each claim fit a

distinct point in the participants' career and show that the other half of the participants did not mention instigators.

Table 21

Instigators as Influencers on Purpose

Point of Career	Description of Claim	Did Not Mention
Beginning (1-3 years)	Conflict with direct supervisors/leadership <u>enhanced</u> purpose in teaching (n = 3, Leigh, Patricia, and Alice)	(n = 5)
National Board Certification (> 4 years) <i>and</i> Last Academic Year (AY 2016-2017)	Conflict with direct supervisors/leadership <u>redirected</u> and <u>refocus</u> purpose in leadership (n = 4, Molly, Saul, Ella, and Alice)	(n = 4)

As I show in the table, only three participants described relationships with instigators as enhancing their purpose as teachers which influenced their flourishing and the way they understood the good life of teaching in the beginning point in their careers. While that means the other five participants did not mention instigating relationships, I thought it was important to highlight these relationships because they were still influential to the flourishing of each participant who described the conflict.

In the next section, I show how five participants described interpersonal conflicts with the leader as influencing their *purpose* and how they described their meaning in teaching as *enhancing*, *redirecting*, and *refocusing*. First, I describe how interpersonal conflict with leaders in the beginning years of teaching *enhanced* Leigh's, Patricia's, and Alice's purpose in their teaching and helped them make meaning of the good life of teaching.

Instigators Who Enhance Purpose

In this section, I claim that interpersonal conflicts within the first several years of teaching existed in notable ways for Leigh, Patricia, and Alice, and yet they believed it was

integral to the good life of teaching. For each of them, their conflicts were with those who were in direct supervisory or leadership roles such as department chairs or assistant principals. While these instigators did not exist for five of the participants, the ones who mentioned the interpersonal conflicts with instigators described these relationships as being important to way they provided an impetus for more noticeable dedication to teaching. In fact, they listed this revelation during their reflections of their experiences with instigators. In Table 22, I offer a zoomed-out review of this claim.

Table 22

Beginning Years of Instigators as Influencers on Purpose

Point of Career	Description of Theme	Did Not Exist
Beginning (1-3 years)	Conflict with leadership <u>enhanced</u> purpose in teaching (n = 3, Leigh, Patricia, and Alice)	(n = 5)

As I show in Table 22, Leigh, Patricia, and Alice experienced instigators in their beginning years of teaching, which was integrally related to how they understood the good life of teaching. I highlight the words and lived experiences of Leigh—The Leader of Learning, Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue, and Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate who epitomize this claim.

“Never really got good vibes.” First, for Leigh and Patricia the conflict with their direct supervisors, specifically their department chairs, was indirect, or as Leigh—The Leader of Learning explained, “I never really got good vibes from one of the department chairs.” I learned from Leigh that the subtlety of the “vibes” that were not so “good” were clearly translated to her through the difficult schedule the department chair gave her as a first-year teacher. To verify her

suspensions, she found out later that her department chair did in fact give her a tough schedule to “see if she could handle it,” or as she said:

I had all-year-long academic classes. I had three in the fall and three in the spring. I never really got good vibes from one of the department chairs; it was co-department-chairs. One of them really liked me, the other one I never got. And the other one helped me out a lot and she eventually confided, she said, “Well, you were kind of given this load because we wanted to see if you could handle it.” And I went, “Okay then.”

Already evidencing a go-getter attitude with an enhanced purpose, Leigh’s “Okay, then” was not said with resignation, but with the intonation of a race-car driver buckling her seatbelt for a wild ride. Leigh realized that the “load” of classes she walked into had a more complex context than just seeing if she “could handle it.” In fact, because Leigh taught at the same school where she student taught, she described how got caught in the already-existing politics. Leigh described the situation as follows:

She said because I had student-taught there, my cooperating teacher was not their favorite person, and so apparently they had somebody else that they wanted. Admin got me, so it was just a very sticky situation and like so they were going to dump this [challenging schedule] and try and chase me off [i.e., leave the school]. And it was actually the male department chair who wasn’t my biggest fan or he didn’t like me that much, and so the female ended up working with me a lot and gave me tips and everything, because it was, it was a challenge. If there was anything going on, it would be one of my students would have been involved.

Leigh’s description of her first year as a “sticky situation” is a euphemism. She was not only given “all academic classes,” but she was given the most challenging students in the school who would “have been involved” in “anything going on” in the school. As a brief reminder from Chapter V, Leigh’s described her first semester as a struggle to connect with her students. In fact, she had her tires slashed in addition to having one of her students involved in a stabbing. Leigh’s realization that they were going to “dump” the classes and specifically some of the most difficult students in her classes to “chase [her] off” however, did not work. With “tips” from the “female” department chair, she survived, or as she said:

So the fact, you know, I look back and I'm like, "Okay," just any time I have a tough class I'm like, "Okay, you got through a whole year of academic freshmen. You can get through one semester with one bad group. You can do this."

Leigh's attitude and self-talk was "you can do this!" and while her department chair instigated a mild conflict with her because she was not the teacher he "wanted," Leigh stayed at the school for 5 years. In fact, in addition to the instigator's doubt of her ability, Leigh was determined to learn how to care for her students, too, as I explained in Chapter V. Leigh said she worked even harder "after Christmas" to be involved in the school and to "show the kids [she] cared." In this way, her purpose—to care about kids as their teacher—was enhanced by the instigation of her department chair giving her "all academic freshmen" and trying to "chase her off." Most recently, Leigh was a department chair and described how "mentoring" new teachers is vitally important to her. In the same breath she explained that "she is a teacher first" to her students, especially the most challenging ones, whom she has since chosen to teach.

"She was not a fan." Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue also had an indirect instigator as a first-year teacher, just like Leigh. Interestingly, I learned from Patricia that during her first semester, she described having "a really good schedule" but to have her schedule, the administration had taken away "one of her classes." The "her" in this scenario was her "department chair" at Patricia's "first school," or as she explained:

The main issue that I had my first three years was with my department chair at my first school. She was the other person who was 9-12-certified. The way my principal worded it is that I was a threat to her, I guess. And so that first semester when they gave me that really good schedule they did so by taking away one of her classes, and so she was not a fan of me at first. And as a new person of course you want everyone's approval, especially the people like your principal or your department chair, those sorts of things. So she was not a fan.

Similar to Leigh, Patricia unknowingly walked into a political situation over which she had no control, and the result was that her department chair "was not a fan" and even saw her as a

“threat.” Patricia admitted wanting approval from her department chair, and while she did not say this explicitly, she implicitly suggested it when she described how she tried to prove she was “worthy” of the “good schedule.” Unfortunately, while this may have been an unconscious strategy or just Patricia’s way as a perseverant pedagogue, her enhanced purpose in teaching and subsequent success backfired. She explained:

Then, when test scores came out she was really not a fan because mine were better and, you know, this brand-new teacher who’s never done this before, and so then of course the next year my schedule was super-fabulous and they definitely rewarded me for it. And so there was just some consistent conflict there mainly just because I think she was not happy that kind of her territory was infringed on. And then she and I were the only two for the rest of my time there who were high-school-certified, so anything past geometry had to pass through us and so that was tough.

Patricia’s response to her department chair’s “passive aggressive” behavior, as she described it, was her decision to enhance her work ethic and purpose in her classroom to make sure her students performed well on their tests. Patricia explained, “I was just working really hard in my classroom.” Even though her “very supportive” principal explained it was just a territorial response because the department chair felt “infringed upon” and it had nothing to do with Patricia, she said it “was tough.” Patricia gave a few examples of the department chair’s “passive aggressive” behaviors:

For example, if there were extra calculators that came in she would just forget to bring me a couple until I heard that other people had gotten five more graphing calculators and I wanted mine as well. Over the years, it got to the point where she was much more blatant with her comments. She would wait until we’re in the middle of the department meeting and decide to kind of say something, and I usually just didn’t react or give her . . . kind of give in. The other people in the department I had zero problems with and I wasn’t the only person that she wasn’t a fan of. I was just her I guess most significant threat at that point in time.

Patricia stayed at the school for 3 years despite of the department chair’s behavior, and as I explained in Chapter V, the relationships she cultivated with students in response to her enhanced purpose resulted in “attending weddings” and even staying in touch with one former

student who now “works for NASA.” Patricia framed it as not “[giving] in” to her behavior. Similar to Leigh, the department chair seemingly motivated Patricia to work even harder in her classroom and build relationships with students.

“There was no way I was going to win.” Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate grew into her advocacy role in her first year of teaching and her purpose in promoting inclusion within her teaching, especially for struggling students, due in part to the instigators she experienced that year. For Alice, unlike Leigh and Patricia, the instigator was not only the absence of a mentor but also the active *lack* of support from her administration when she decided to teach a book called *Black Boy*. Alice described her meeting with the administration and the parent:

And there was no way I was going to win that [conflict]. I’m not going to change that mom and the administration was not going to support me. Even though the book was on the reading list and we had two hundred copies of it, it wasn’t going to happen.

Even though Alice explained that she had to acquiesce to the parent due to the lack of support from her administrator, she also said, “I think it gave me more impetus to figure out a way to make what I felt needed to happen, happen because at that point I saw the segregation.” As already mentioned, the lack of direct supervisory support for Alice was also a subtle and indirect instigator of conflict that enhanced her purpose in teaching. While I use the word *enhance*, Alice used the word “impetus,” Patricia explained how she “worked really hard,” and Leigh’s self-talk was “You can do this!” All three of them, even as first-year teachers, endured conflict with leaders and direct supervisors who not only did not support them but also made their job harder. For them, however, they explained that it enhanced their purpose to be better teachers and value the good life of teaching and standing with and for their students and their beliefs.

In the next section, I show how teachers who were growing into their own leadership roles during and after their National Board Certification (>4 years) described and understood their own flourishing through teacher-to-teacher relationships, which I categorized as instigators. As I explain next, these interpersonal conflicts with colleagues redirected the purpose of leadership for Molly, Chris, and Ella.

Instigators Who Redirect and Refocus Purpose

During the National Board years, all of the teachers in this study emphasized that their primary purpose, connected to how they understood the good life of teaching, was the self-reflection necessary to help students grow ($n = 8$). However, since becoming leaders, four of the older teachers in this study with more than 15 years of experience realized they needed to shift their leadership as the result of colleagues, whom I categorized as instigators. As a brief reminder, instigators are people who the participants described as influencing a change in their individual behavior. In Table 23, I preview this finding and show how four teachers with over 15 years of experience recalled leaders and colleagues with whom an interpersonal conflict redirected and refocused their purpose in their own leadership and in the good life of teaching.

Table 23

NBCT Years and Recent Instigators as Influencers on Purpose

Point of Career	Description of Claim	Did Not Mention
National Board Certification (> 4 years) <i>and</i> Last Academic Year (AY 2016-2017)	Conflict with leadership <u>redirected</u> and <u>refocus</u> purpose in leadership ($n = 4$, Molly, Saul, Ella, and Alice)	($n = 4$)

As Table 23 shows, there was an even split between colleagues who did and did not mention *meaningful* interpersonal conflict. While the other four may have experienced conflict with colleagues or supervisors, it did not emerge in the interviews as we talked about the challenges, struggles, and experiences of their teaching and how, if at all, they flourished.

“He just pulled the plug.” First, to illuminate this claim, I highlight how Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist and veteran Humanities teacher with over 25 years of experience, explained a situation with her administration that helped her refocus her leadership beyond the school walls. For Ella, integrity and “cheating” were important issues for her since the first years of her career. Therefore, as School Improvement Chair, she explained how she “did try” to implement an “honor code system” run by the kids during her tenure, though she later found out it was really “a farce at [her] school and most schools.” She described the experience as follows:

While I was school improvement chair, I did try one thing I really did believe in, which was an honor code and an honor code system, because we’re an upper-middle-class school where cheating and plagiarism is just prevalent. And my principal at the time let us go on and on and on and on and on to the point that we came up with the honor code system and we were going to train the kids in the system, and all of a sudden he just pulled the plug on it because he thought that it would kind of give a bad brand to our school if we made it a point that we needed to stop cheating at our school.

Emphasizing how the principal “let us go on and on and on and on” showed how Ella originally felt like she had the support of her direct supervisor and the leader of this school to start “an honor code system” that she “really did believe in.” Her shock was abundantly clear as she stated, “All of the sudden he just pulled the plug.” While his reason was to avoid “a bad brand,” Ella did not buy it. As she explained:

And at that point, I realized, “Well, this is just a farce. It is not a grassroots.” I thought school improvement was going to be about empowerment and grassroots leadership, know what I mean? And as I realized, “Well, this whole thing is really just kind of a puppet show to make central office happy.” So I was like, “Well, I’m just going to quit that.” That’s just not . . . this wasn’t a valuable experience.

Ella's statement that it "wasn't a valuable experience" showed, from my perspective, how she was still a bit upset about her principal's actions, even though this was several years prior. Her passion, however, and purpose for activism and "empowerment and grassroots leadership" *redirected* almost immediately. As she said, "she quit that" and several years later not only started her own nonprofit to promote public education across the state, but also, as highlighted in a documentary about her life, focused on inspiring the students to co-create a positive culture in her school. For this experience, however, Ella's personal investment, which she thought she shared with her principal until he "pulled the plug," helped her *redirect* her leadership beyond school improvement to state improvement.

"She was threatened by me." Similarly, Molly, a 20-year veteran Math teacher, dealt with a disheartening conflict with a colleague soon after she renewed her National Boards. Similar to Leigh and Patricia's experiences in their first years of teaching, Molly was at a new school and "There was one teacher in particular who was not nice to [her], underhandedly." For Molly, who had experienced strong "family" environments, this dramatic change in interpersonal relationships felt "miserable." Similar to Patricia's experience with the department chair she had unintentionally "threatened," Molly noticed that this younger colleague also seemed to be "threatened" by her. She explained:

I think she was threatened by me. I came in and I had experience teaching her course and I think she was scared that I would take it away from her, which was by no means my goal. I didn't want her course. But it was just, I mean, we've come a long way but the tension's still there.

Even though the teacher who had been at the school a little longer than Molly also had less experience, Molly realized that she must have been "scared that [Molly] would take [the course] away from her." Molly was honest in that it was "not [her] goal" to take away anyone's classes. In fact, even though Molly's experience was teaching the "extremes" of both high- and low-level

courses, she explained that she realized her other purpose and goal as a more experienced leader was collaboration. She refocused on this purpose by noting the absence of collaboration with this one teacher. As she explained:

It was the first time I had taught [the higher-level course]. You know, “The exam’s already been made. This is the exam we’re giving.” “Okay, sure,” because we all get the same tests. And then I’m like, “Do you have anything for review?” and she said, “No, I just kind of do some stuff in class.” And then one of my former students came back and was like, “Yeah, we had this review sheet,” and I was like, “Huh?” And so she was just lying to me.

As a result, of this other teacher “lying” to her and not sharing material, Molly refocused her intentions on collaborating and sharing with her colleagues. With conviction, she said:

I was not going to conform to that. I’ve always tried to share ideas, like, “Hey guys, this is something I did in my classroom. I want to share it with you.” I’d get PLT meetings. I was on a PLT with the nice person for a couple of years, which made my life miserable. Then, that third year I no longer had to be on a PLT with her. Also, I was grading with a rubric when I was in Durham and I shared that with colleagues here and a lot of them embraced it. And now we’re back to the ten-point scale, but back then I said, “Why is it fair that you have seventy chances to fail but only thirty chances to pass?”

As Molly described her experience with the “nice person” a euphemism for the person who “made [her] life miserable” in the PLT, her body language changed from relaxed to tense and the pace of her speech quickened. As I previously mentioned, PLCs, also called PLTs, were not where the teacher participants in this study naturally found support or collaboration. In direct contract to this purpose, for example, Molly found misery. After remembering this personal hardship, she launched into discussing her passion for grading and using rubrics to help students “have a chance.” This had been her goal and her message in the PLT where she had been shut down, and as Molly began talking about rubrics, her face glowed. In turn, Molly asked administration for permission to not only start her own cross-school PLT with a teacher at another school who taught the same low-level course she did, but also “to get [her] near people where I can have collaboration.” Though she “cried a lot” during the years of conflict with the

other teacher because she was “so upset” and “so isolated,” Molly did receive support from administration when she asked to move to a classroom that was closer to newer teachers, so she could redirect her leadership to be “a buddy” to help them and also be “much happier.” She also used the cover of a PLT to check the school’s box as she was already working with a teacher at a different school, whom she had actually found supportive and helpful to her teaching. Ultimately, Molly made it clear that through this interpersonal conflict, she realized her love and passion for helping newer teachers grow.

“She steamrolled everybody.” Finally, the conflict and instigator who most drastically influenced a participant in this study was an assistant principal who directly supervised Saul—The Steady Problem Solver. With over 15 years of experience, Saul explained the climax of a conflicted relationship between the supervisory assistant principal and his department. He said:

We had an assistant principal who basically came in and disrespected the entire department. She steamrolled everybody. She left our department chair crying. Every time she met with her she was just so nasty and mean and unprofessional. Yeah, and when she met with us the same thing happened and what I recognized was that I knew I could not continue to grow as a professional working with her as our department liaison. And so out of the sixteen teachers in our department, seven of us resigned.

As Saul pointed out in the above quotation, not only did he resign, but seven of his teacher colleagues left the school and his department because of one assistant principal’s “disrespect.” This assistant principal was “so nasty and mean and unprofessional.”

As I tried to understand the aftermath and even the context leading up to the mass exodus of almost half of department from a school, Saul explained that “it’s still kind of shrouded in mystery” even to him. All he could guess, he explained, was that “assistant principal was abusing her authority and was alienating departments for some time, and for some reason I think [the principal] didn’t know about it.” Saul conveyed his empathy for the assistant principal in guessing that she may have been experiencing some “mental health-related issue” and that he did

not—to that day—“wish her any ill will.” In fact, she left 15 days after everyone all resigned. He then tried to explain how he made meaning of the experience:

But that was a very, very difficult, trying time professionally for a number of us, but what it did for me is it kind of pushed me into looking into various ways about what teaching could be and what my role might be.

Saul’s response, like Molly and Ella, was not to quit teaching outright due to the interpersonal conflict he experienced, even though Saul did leave teaching for 7 days until he found a new job. He shared that that it was hard for him to leave that school after 10 years of investment, but instead he refocused and redirected his introspection about “what teaching could be and what [his] role might be.” For Saul, he had already invested the last several years in changing his curriculum to a “flipped” structure when the instruction happens outside of class through technology, and the collaboration and work, traditionally thought of as homework, happen during the class. Therefore, “as luck would have it,” his principal, who again was “surprised” by the entire incident, discovered an opportunity. Saul explained the sequence of events as follows:

[The principal] said, “I know that you’ve been looking for some other options and I have a colleague who is actually going to be opening a blended virtual high school.” And she said, “You need to apply.” And I said, “That sounds wonderful.” And so she sent me the information, I called them on the phone, I talked to them, and she was actually instrumental in my getting an interview. So her recommendation was phenomenal. She could vouch for the great work I’d been doing within blended learning and the staff development to support other people in our building as they were blending their classes. And so it was almost like it’s just sort of . . . it was the perfect moment for investigating this new environment. To me, it was almost like a eureka moment where it was the perfect time.

While his principal helped him find the next opportunity in “perfect time,” this also allowed Saul to keep his benefits and continuing contract.

I noticed in the interview how quickly Saul refocused on the importance of his work with “blended learning” and helping others in the building to blend their classes as well. He explained he could not go back to a “traditional” classroom after working “eighty hours a week” in order

“to recreate every instructional resource for two new grade levels.” In addition to rethinking the value of a traditional classroom, he explained that he knew he could only go to a place where he could be treated as a professional. For Saul—as for Ella and Molly—working with other colleagues whom they respected and who respected them and their ideas was implicitly missing from their relationships with instigators. Saul summarized this theme best in his own words:

I think for me being treated with respect is very, very important and through my entire career I have been surrounded by people who were wonderful, I know are wonderful, and they had student learning as the central focus of the work we’re doing. They empowered teachers to learn, to improve, to grow. My professionalism was never questioned. I was always, when someone came to ask me about a student, my opinion was paramount. My expertise were relevant. And to be spoken to by this person in a way that was, oh, I would say probably the . . . no, I would say definitely the most disrespect I’ve ever experienced in my life, not just my professional career—

Saul’s “entire career” had been “surrounded by people who were wonderful.” To me, this emphasizes why the instigator category was critically important, even if an outlier. Because Saul made meaning of this conflict and relationship with this instigator as leading to a “eureka” moment, he decided to teach at a digital school where he is now a pioneer in learning with and through technology. While this interpersonal conflict could have ended his career, it did not. Instead, it *redirected* Saul’s leadership to be a part of a brand-new experiment of a blended school that capitalized on the leadership he had already been practicing at his old school.

In summary, for these teachers ($n = 4$), the instigators were integrated into their own flourishing because they helped them redirect their *purpose* in leadership, especially after they had claimed their own leadership status through National Board Certification. For Ella, it was her purpose to lead state-wide grassroots activism. For Molly, it was an emphasis on leading through collaboration. For Saul, it was his purpose to revolutionize classrooms through technology and blended learning on a school-wide level. For Alice, whom I did not mention here since I

described her interpersonal conflict from her early years of teaching, it was redirecting her leadership to her own family after a conflict with a colleague and the principal at her school.

My additional insights after learning from these participants, especially when I re-read Saul's words and listened to him again, was the importance he placed on the words that "my opinion was paramount." I realized the conflict he experienced with his instigator mirrored the interpersonal conflict Molly, Ella, and Alice experienced too, which was that their leaders and supervisors did not respect them and, almost as important, did not respect their ideas. In other words, the missing key ingredient of "respect" seemed to me to make these interpersonal conflicts memorable. As a result, I learned that each participant sought out other environments, other colleagues, and other passions to integrate them into their teaching and leading, so they could feel respected and be in the good life of teaching they had so intentionally crafted. Therefore, the implicit finding is that these participants showed their own self-described flourishing not only in spite of but because of these instigators. This was possible because of the tremendous amount of self-respect they carried in addition to an abundance of "wonderful people" (Saul) who outweighed the "misery" (Molly) or "isolation" (Ella, Danielle, and Molly) that would be possible if a teacher were surrounded only by instigators.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described how these eight teacher-leaders identified specific kinds of relationships with colleagues as integral to their flourishing as they enhanced their *passion* and *practical wisdom* in two categories: mentors (n = 7) and support systems (n = 8). I also explained how some of the adult or collegial relationships that these teacher-leaders experienced were with instigators (n = 3, in the beginning years and n = 4 in later years) who, from their view, caused interpersonal conflict. I learned that even through relationships with instigators and interpersonal

conflict, these teachers understood them constructively as *enhancing and refocusing* their purpose as teachers and leaders—the third strand of flourishing.

Overall, I learned that colleagues, especially those who acted as mentors, were important in the beginning years and through National Board Certification ($n = 7$) as they helped these teachers discern their purpose and empower them to live the good life of teaching even on the toughest days. Additionally, the mentors these teachers described gave these seven participants a concrete representation and example of “Who or what do [they might] hope to become?” (Higgins, 2011, p. 31) as wise teachers. Therefore, it was not surprising to me that being a mentor, or giving back to new teachers, was important and fundamental to flourishing for these teachers most recently too ($n = 6$). To the majority of these participants ($n = 6$), their close connection with new and old teachers was vital to how they understood themselves as living the good life of teaching.

I also learned that groups of colleagues with whom they shared a common *purpose* and *passion* helped the participants feel belonging and connection—crucial to the good life of teaching. These support systems ranged from “family” (Saul and Molly) to “close friends” (Ella, Chris, and Alice) especially in the beginning years of their career and through the difficult process of earning their National Board Certification. Additionally, I claim that support systems in the most recent year of teaching elevated their communal responsibility for creating a school culture of respect and belonging—for them and their students ($n = 8$), which was integral to their leadership (further explained in Chapter VII). While these support systems changed throughout their careers, the teachers explained that sharing their passions with others ultimately helped facilitate their own good life of teaching.

Finally, I claimed that most of these teachers ($n = 7$) described the importance of relationships—often with supervisors who were also teachers and sometimes with assistant principals—as accelerating a drastic change in their career direction or their *purpose*. These volatile teacher-to-teacher relationships were *instigators* because the interpersonal conflict that the seven teachers described either *enhanced* their purpose and dedication to becoming a stronger and more effective classroom teacher ($n = 3$) or *redirected* ($n = 5$) their purpose and passion as leaders.

In the next chapter, I explain the last key finding, which was the claim that these teacher-leaders described and understood their own flourishing as entangled in their leadership. By leadership, I mean they flourished through both formal and informal roles, leading other adults and initiatives within and beyond their classrooms (AY 2016-2017). Additionally, I learned that these teachers framed their own flourishing as fluid in their lives—or not static or one-size-fits-all throughout their careers. Therefore, in this concluding analytic chapter, I explain that the variability in how they discerned their leadership responsibilities relative to their own passion, purpose, and practical wisdom works in conjunction with their ultimate aim: to practice good teaching.

Chapter VII

FINDINGS: THE PUSH AND PULL OF LEADERSHIP

ENTANGLED IN FLOURISHING

In this chapter, I discuss my claim that these eight teacher-leaders described and understood their leadership entangled in their own flourishing, specifically as it mobilized their purpose, passion, and, most clearly, practical wisdom. By entangled, I mean that the connection between their leadership—both through formal and informal roles—and their flourishing was messy, layered, and yet inextricable from how they believed they lived the good life and how it changed over time. As I discussed in Chapters V and VI, these teacher-leader participants saw their purpose and passion spring to life in their relationships with students and colleagues. In addition to valuing these relationships and communities, I learned that all eight participants were constantly facing the “tragic dilemma” (Higgins, 2001, p. 52) of competing passions and purposes between their highest priority—teaching *well*—and additional opportunities to help, connect, and lead others—including their families. John Dewey (1916), an educational philosopher, captured this tension best when he discussed how it is “balancing the distinctive capacity of the individual with his social service” (p. 308). Leadership, I learned, for these teacher-leader participants both compounded and illuminated this *struggle* of balancing the demands, the tensions, and the priorities of teaching, which was entangled in their own good life.

Overall, all eight participants claimed they were still learning how to manage their time and leadership to ensure they lived, led, and, and most importantly, taught *well*.

Chapter Overview

To explain this complex claim in the lives of these eight participants, I divide this chapter into three sections. The first two sections are chronologically organized. In them, I explain (a) the entanglement of teaching *well* in the beginning years as the baseline ($n = 8$) to the good life and as a necessary struggle ($n = 7$); then (b) in the post-National Board Years, I explain how teaching and the push and pull of leading *well* were entangled in the good life for all eight teachers. In the last section of this chapter, (c) I offer three participants' experience—Saul, Alice, and Ella, whose experiences *overall* fit the patterns, yet they also experienced a life crisis. I discuss that their life-crisis was a discourager or encourager to their flourishing (Research Questions 2 and 3), but instead I learned that they saw it as an entangled opportunity to deepen their discernment of what their good life of teaching meant to them.

To be more specific, in the first section, I explain that for all eight participants teaching *well* was the work they described as a necessity, or what I call a baseline, for the good life ($n = 8$). Especially in their beginning years, these participants expressed that they knew their prioritization of time and effort for their students (over themselves and their families) was not sustainable, but rather a necessary “struggle” to live the good life ($n = 7$). In stark contrast to all seven other participants, Patricia—The Perseverant Pedagogue offered that her experience was not that much of a struggle because she always had a handle on “time management” and tended to be naturally “balanced” by prioritizing “giving her students timely, direct feedback.” For the other seven participants, however, I learned that they understood their struggles as opportunities

to improve and adjust their strategies—incrementally and over time—to teach students *well* rather than a reason to leave the profession.

In summary, I claim that all eight participants’ experiences in those first years of teaching cultivated their own practical wisdom in the good work of teaching *well* and was the essential baseline of their flourishing. With this baseline of teaching *well* affirmed and strengthened through the National Board Certification process, they then pushed towards—and were pushed by others—to entangle themselves in the leadership opportunities beyond their classroom, which I explain in the second section.

After the first several years and after discerning their own *good work* (Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi, & Damon, 2008) in their classroom, my second claim presented in the second section is how all eight participants experienced the push and pull of leadership *beyond* their classroom. Through increasing their leadership influence and scope, all eight participating teachers continued to experience the *phronesis*—or the practical wisdom—to help them discern their own flourishing. Higgins (2011) explained this process as learning “what place each practice should have in my life and how to integrate [my] distinctive modes of perception and valuation into one perspective” (p. 51). In other words, their own flourishing was entangled in their process of integrating what it meant for them to teach *well* within their classroom first, and then how they could lead *well* over time during their careers.

To be even more specific, during National Board Certification and through the most recent academic year (AY 2016-2017), I found that these participants described their experiences of pushing forward—or being pushed—to lead adults in their school ($n = 8$), in the district ($n = 6$), and the state ($n = 4$) as entangled in their flourishing. I also claim that all eight teachers changed over time in their understanding and capacity for discernment, known as practical

wisdom, about when to pull back or refine their leadership by saying “no” to certain opportunities—even Patricia (n = 8). For all eight participants, I discovered that saying “no” was necessary to refocus their priorities and their energy *both* on their students (i.e., teaching *well*) and themselves and their families (i.e., living well) because they had become too caught up in leading other initiatives and other adults—which took them out of their classroom. Again, with the exception of Patricia’s ability to “balance” her priorities to her students and to herself *in the beginning years*, all eight participants viewed their struggle to balance the priorities of teaching and leading well as entangled in their understanding of what it takes to live the good life as *ongoing*.

Finally, in the last section, I claim that, Saul’s, Alice’s, and Ella’s experiences are what I consider to be in line with the original two claims, but they also had personal crises which are outliers. In other words, I discovered that Saul, Alice, and Ella described and understood their personal crises as opportunities to deepen their discernment of the good life. This was in addition to the incremental changes they were already making over time. However, I think that their experiences are important to this chapter—given the overall purpose of this research to reconsider the narratives around why teachers leave. To be clear, these three teachers did not leave the profession, even though their own actions nearly “killed” them (their own words). Interestingly, they discussed how their understanding of the good life of teaching, simplified to being happy all the time, experiencing 24/7 well-being, or never experiencing struggle—or even trauma, did not fit their lived experience. Instead, they saw their personal crises as entangled in their own flourishing or good life too. In fact, in the midst of the ongoing “tragic dilemma” (Higgins, 2011, p. 52), these three participants described what positive psychologists call “post-traumatic growth” (Kashdan & Kane, 2011; McGonigal, 2015; Park, Peterson, & Seligman,

2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 455). In other words, they shared with me that they saw the crisis as an opportunity to re-evaluate their choices and create even more positive change in their lives for better “balance” (for Saul and Alice) or fiercer “faith” (Ella) to live the good life of teaching.

To display these claims, I give a zoomed-out overview of this chapter in Table 24. In the first row of the table as well as the first section of this chapter, I explain how the majority of teachers described that leading by *teaching well* in their classrooms was a struggle because they viewed their time, energy, and prioritization of their classroom (i.e., their students) as being far from sustainable (n = 7). In the next row of the table, I show how the second section of this chapter outlines the ways these teachers pushed for (and were pushed or “tapped” [Drago-Severson, 2009, 2014, 2016]) for leadership in their school (n = 8), district (n = 6), and state (n = 2) to guide and lead other adults. In the last column, I show my claim that they learned they did not have “enough time to do it all” and had to start saying “no” and pull back their leadership in order to teach and live *well* (n = 8). Importantly, I use an asterisk to highlight how Saul, Alice, and Ella both fit the claims and were important exceptions to the rule. Therefore, in the last section of this chapter, I explain how I learned that for these three teachers, balancing priorities included a time of personal crisis.

Therefore, by the push and pull of leadership as entangled living of the good life or flourishing, I mean all the teachers in this study saw themselves as flourishing—even in the midst of struggle or personal crisis, in which they were entangled in the tension and “tragic dilemmas” (Higgins, 2011, p. 52) of their often-competing priorities of practice (i.e., teaching, leading, and living well).

Table 24

Overview of Leadership Entangled in Flourishing

Point of Career	Leadership Opportunities by Scope of Influence				Balancing Priorities and the Push/Pull of Teaching and Leadership
	Classroom	School	District	State	
Beginning (1-3 years)	(n = 8)	(n = 2)	(n = 2)	(n = 0)	Not enough time to do it all (n = 8*) *Seeing Crisis as Opportunity (n = 1, Saul)
NBCT (>4 years)		(n = 8)	(n = 6)	(n = 2)	Saying “No” to Leadership (n = 8*)
Last Academic Year (AY 2016-2017)		(n = 6)	(n = 6)	(n = 4)	*Seeing Crisis as Opportunity (n = 2, Ella and Alice)

Table 24 offers a zoomed-out perspective of how these eight teacher-leaders “pushed” the scope of their leadership to the school, district, and state levels while also balancing their priorities, and perhaps pulling back, in order to flourish.

Next, I explain how seven teachers named their beginning years of flourishing as a worthy struggle in which they honed their purpose—teaching their students *well* in their classroom as a baseline for leading *well* beyond and living the good life.

The Beginning Years: Teaching and Leading Well in the Classroom

In this section, I explain my finding that for all of the participants, teaching *well* in the classroom required an enormous amount of time and energy that they believed was not sustainable but worth the struggle—to this day—in order to live the good life of teaching (n = 7). In other words, experiencing *teaching well* as a struggle was their baseline or the essential good work that they described as necessary to flourish. Importantly, teaching *well* for these teachers was a form of leadership for them. This is important to note because the initial interviews were the contexts in which these participants described their beginning years of teaching. In these, I learned how all eight teachers valued and prioritized the time-consuming

struggle of being able to teach *well* (n = 8, teaching *well*; n = 7, named it as a struggle). Through these conversations, I learned how strongly the participants in my study lived up to Fairman and Mackenzie's (2015) definition of a teacher-leader in that they were “galvanized by the desire to improve and thus ensure learning for all students” (p. 64) above all else. In other words, they described how learning to manage, integrate, and attain this aspiration was an ongoing process and opportunity to cultivate practical wisdom over time.

The Beginning Years as the Baseline: “Struggles” and “Baggage”

To illuminate this claim, I discuss how Chris, a Math teacher with approximately 10 years of experience, reflected upon his “productive struggle” in the classroom as omnipresent throughout his career. I also note how Ella, a Humanities teacher with over 25 years of experience, understood the struggle of leading her classroom as sorting through her own “baggage” of what she thought being a teacher would look like. To me, these two participants’ experiences best represent how seven participants described the time and energy they invested in teaching *well* as a struggle. Again, by baseline, I mean that I learned how *teaching well* was vital and necessarily present for all eight teachers to their description of living the good life. After this section, I explain how I learned that these participants knew, even during their first few years, that their time investment would not be sustainable long-term.

Chris’s “productive struggle.” Chris—The Crusader for Kids, who had 10 years of experience teaching Math, described the “battle scars” from his first-year teaching, but told me there is a “misconception” that those problems disappear after the “first few years” of teaching. He elaborated on the constant struggle he experienced:

I think there’s a little bit of a misconception that your first few years you go through and you have all these battle scars and then after that you’re good, like those just all go away. I think I’ve struggled with the same thing now. I struggled with since the first five minutes of my first class.

As Chris explained in the above quotation, some of the struggles with students do not disappear or “all go away.” Importantly, when he described the “helplessness” he felt, he did not “attach that to [his] first three years.” Although the students change every year and give him an opportunity to try again, Chris explained that he still met kids who made him feel “helplessness” or who presented new struggles to him, like “when [he is] teaching a kid in ninth grade math that can’t add nineteen plus seven without using their fingers.” Instead of these moments and problems acting as a discourager or encourager to his flourishing—that is, elements that take away from or add to his flourishing explicitly (Research Questions 2 and 3), Chris described this struggle as entangled in his purpose in teaching *well* or, as he said, he had “sold out for the job.” By entangled, I mean the connection between his efforts to teach *well*, thus leading from the classroom, and flourishing was messy, layered, and yet inextricable from how he believed he was living the good life. In other words, because the struggle with students was implicit in teaching well, for Chris, it was also inextricably connected to the good life. He elaborated:

I mean, I think I first went into teaching thinking I would try to make this as easy as possible for kids, but that robs kids of the opportunities to fail and learn from it and go through what I’ve said earlier, productive struggle. So there were definitely failures on a micro level, but on a macro level I think it was very successful because I ended my three years really just wanting to continue to become better and really sold out for the job.

To “become better” in his first years teaching, Chris reflected when it “ended” that he did not want to “rob” the kids of “opportunities to fail.” In other words, he “ended” his efforts to make things easier for the kids and explained how he realized that these “opportunities to fail” were a “productive struggle” for both him and his students.

Interestingly, the concept of productive struggle is a common frame used in Math classes based on an exploratory study by Warshauer (2015) that built on Hiebert and Grouws's (2007) framework. These researchers and practitioners suggested that “struggles” (Warshauer, 2015,

p. 376; Piaget, 1960) are meaningful learning opportunities just like “some perplexity, confusion or doubt” (Dewey, 1933, p. 12) help build understanding. For Chris, the “failures” he experienced in his classroom were on a “micro-level” and yet he still felt “successful because [he wanted] to continue to become better.” In this way, Chris exemplified the value of being a teacher-leader for whom flourishes means, first and foremost, teaching *well*, a focus that I understood as important to all eight teacher-leaders. Overall, I learned that the journey to cultivate practical wisdom and live the good life of teaching as a classroom teacher was a struggle for each participant in slightly unique ways. For instance, Alice described the struggle of “pacing” her lessons for all her students and doing everything on her own, as I explained in Chapter VI. Despite of these slight yet important nuances, all the participants described struggle as necessary experiences to deepen their ability to teach well (n = 7).

To show a contrasting frame of the struggle in detail, since each teacher centered on a different aspect of their teaching practice as presenting a struggle, I next describe that Ella’s struggle was not feeling “helpless,” but rather feeling authentic with and in front of her students. I discuss Ella next because she, like Chris and Alice, won the First-Year Teacher of the Year award, and thus were elected to be the best “of the worst” by their peers, as Ella teased. Her experience represents the internal struggle that all seven teachers described, which was sorting through their expectations of who they imagined they would be as a teacher and who they actually were.

Ella’s sorting through teaching “baggage.” While Chris, who had 10 years of teaching experience at the time of the interview, described the “productive struggle” of leading and teaching his students, Ella—with 25 years of experience—offered a unique frame about how her students in her classroom were her mirror for reflection and changing her perception of what

good teaching looks like. Ella best represents all seven participants who needed time in their beginning years of teaching because they struggled to sort through their imagined aspirations of who they would be as teachers, based on “movies” (Leigh and Ella) or even just their own motivations to “change the world” (Alice).

Again, while the struggle to teach *well* for the seven teachers ranged from writing “engaging” lessons for Danielle or “pacing” the content appropriately for Alice, I discovered that learning to teach *well* for Ella in her classroom was a struggle of learning to be “integrated” as a person and a teacher. Ella, interestingly, had carved out more space than most to find the best way of articulating her struggle because a few filmmakers selected her to be the focus of their documentary about teaching in North Carolina. Capturing her process of reflection, Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist framed her career as follows in the documentary about her teaching when she said:

First five years you are just trying out your material. . . . The next ten years you are perfecting your materials. . . . The real challenge was to take all that baggage about the teacher I wanted to be and get to know myself better and articulate that better: what was really—in my mind—and what was really in my heart and so when I integrated who I really was with my job. That came together. I was at that point a teacher. I was the same person inside my classroom as I was outside my classroom . . . truly in touch with my values and able to express those values and my true self within my classroom.

Ella referenced “trying out your material” much like she was auditioning for a movie and actualizing scripts for a scene, yet she explained how she still felt a disconnect because she needed to “get to know herself better” rather than the “Edutainer” (Johnson & McElroy, 2010) role she was trying to fill. When Ella said she had to “articulate better what was really in my mind and what was really in my heart and so when I integrated who I really was with my job,” she captured the essence of the good life of teaching. This was not only true for Ella but also for all eight participants, including Patricia who did not see this as a struggle because of feeling

more “prepared.” Through Ella’s timeframes of “Year 5” and “10 years,” she also showed that sorting through this “baggage” was not an immediate fix, but the struggle changed for her over time.

For Ella, the struggle for wisdom in her practice was learning how to be “in touch with [her] values and to be able to express those values and [her] true self within her classroom.” While this quote was one that she was reflecting on her entire career, her words aligned with Palmer (1993, 1997, 2017) and Hansen (1994, 2000, 2001, 2007) who referenced teaching as being *critical praxis* that incorporates the heart. Palmer (1997) explained that “We teach who we are” (p. xi) and “teaching tugs at the heart, opens the heart, even breaks the heart—and the more one loves teaching, the more heartbreaking it can be” (p. 23). As Ella explained, working through her own “baggage” to be in “touch with [her] own values” within her classroom helped her teach and lead her students. In other words, my interpretation of Ella’s experience was that to feel like she was living the good life, she had to teach *well*. Teaching *well*, for her, was when she “was finally the same person inside my classroom as I was outside my classroom.” Then, she felt that she was “at that point a teacher.”

In summary, Chris and Ella illuminated how the struggle to teach *well* within their own classroom helped them to understand, learn, and become wise in their practice of teaching *well* and thus live the good life. Their priority was—in the beginning—to “be a teacher,” and this was the baseline and the struggle inherent in their good life for them and for all seven teachers, even those who did not win First-Year Teacher of the Year award. All seven participants, with the exception of Patricia, struggled to do the good work of teaching up to their own expectations, either because of their own motivation (Chris, Saul, Molly, and Danielle) or because of their expectations from movies (Danielle and Ella) and/or from being the next world-changer (Alice).

In their exact descriptions of the struggle, they all saw this learning curve as an essential struggle, in their mind, to teach well.

In the next section, I juxtapose this early-career struggle—to teach *well* in their first years—with my second claim that seven teachers realized that their work ethic in the midst of these struggles was not sustainable long-term. As a brief reminder, Patricia did not voice this as a struggle, but she felt she managed the demands well because “time management” was her strength.

The Beginning Years: A Lack of Balance “Nor enough time”

In this section, I discuss how the struggle to teach well was coupled with the struggle for balance in the beginning years, yet these were inherent and entangled in the good life—not distractors or encouragers (Research Questions 2 and 3), as I expected. In other words, I found that seven teachers saw their prioritization of their students, time investment in their pedagogy, and work ethic in their classroom as inherently imbalanced and unsustainable. Interestingly, despite the lack of balance, seven of these participants still believed they were living the good life of teaching during this time. To illustrate how this lack of balance was an additional struggle, I offer the lived experiences of Chris—The Crusader for Kids, Danielle—The Defender of Intellect, and Molly—The Mother of Extremes, who exemplified for me how these seven participants understood their first years as pushing too hard and in a way that was not sustainable long-term.

Methodologically, I was able to claim this finding about how all seven participants described not having enough time, not only because of their own descriptions but also because each interview protocol included a moment when I asked the participant to draw a circle diagram or pie chart and show me how, on average, they used their time during each distinct point in their

career (i.e., the beginning years, the National Board Certification years, and the most recent academic year) (see Appendices A, B, and C for Interview Protocol #1, #2, and #3, respectively). As an example, Patricia's circle was literally "50/50" (her words) and she described how 50% of her time was at school and the other at home. Over time, both through their circle diagrams in each interview in which they discussed their experiences in that distinct point of their career—and their own descriptions, they explained how they learned to be better leaders and managers of their time in the classroom in order to continue living, leading, and teaching well beyond it.

Chris and Danielle: "Nor will there ever be enough time." To start, Chris and Danielle both felt that they never had "enough time" to live up to their own high expectations of teaching *well*. For example, Chris explained how his time investment in his first years was idiosyncratic to his personality since he never wanted to "suck at anything." I asked him to draw a circle and divide it like a pie chart into sections based on how he used his time. After doing so, he pointed to it when he said:

I really don't want to ever suck at anything, so I was all in on making sure I put my best foot forward. This [the circle he drew] is not a sustainable diagram. Like the way I was my first two or three years, I couldn't do that now, but it doesn't mean it that it felt a really burdensome.

Chris was quick to describe that the time he gave to teaching (almost 75% of his circle diagram, which I explained earlier) was his own choice and the lack of balance was not "burdensome" to him at all. He elaborated on this interpretation and said:

I just don't . . . I don't think there has ever been nor will there ever be enough time in the day to be like as good at this job as you could be. So in my first few years, like I said, I would be at school until like sometimes eight o'clock at night, not that I was sitting there crying in my desk like, "I can't do this anymore." It's just that was a struggle, was like that's not normal to work that long. So doing that is not a sustainable endeavor. Now the struggle is different because I have a life and a kid on the way.

Again, Chris was not “crying in [his] desk” about to quit, as research on demoralized teachers might suggest based on their overwhelming workload or poor conditions (Santoro, 2011).

Instead, he said matter-of-factly, “it was just a struggle” and, to him, it was “not normal to work that long.” He explained to me that his time investment was “not a sustainable endeavor” but he did it anyway his first years of teaching—knowing that he would eventually have to change because he had “a life and [as he hoped] a kid on the way.”

Similar to Chris’s self-described “struggle” of pouring all his time into teaching, Danielle, the ESL teacher with approximately 10 years of experience, explained that she “had expected it to be stressful” and that:

I guess teaching had the reputation of being a lot of work for not much pay. I don’t know where I got [that idea], if I got it from any one place. It’s kind of like one of those truisms that may not be true that people say to each other.

Danielle explained that her experience lived up to the previously conceived “reputation” she had of teaching and that it bolstered the “truism” that teaching is “a lot of work.” Her circle diagram, which she drew to show me how much time she spent teaching in her first years relative to other activities or tasks, mirrored Chris’s circle diagram drawing. In essence, they both showed me that the majority of their time was at school. As Danielle explained:

It felt like I was at school half the time because I would get home late—for goodness sake. And then what stands out to me a lot is, when I’m looking back on it, when I got home from school during those first years I wouldn’t even watch a movie or watch a TV show. There was no time to do anything. I just wanted to be planning—and I didn’t have Google Docs, so I was writing all things and emailing them to myself—either planning or creating things, lesson materials to do.

Danielle’s experience, that she was at school “half the time,” did not mean half of her life, but rather half of the time she had given herself outside of her work and teaching (i.e., approximately 75% of her life). As she explained, even when she was home, she was always “planning or creating things” for her students to do, just as Chris did. Emphatically, she expressed, “There

was no time to do anything” outside of teaching. In other words, Chris and Danielle showed me that their struggle in their beginning years was in spending *too* much time “creating things” and investing almost their entire lives at school.

Next, I explain how and why the struggle of teaching *well*, which was their burgeoning teacher-leadership from within the classroom (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015), was entangled in the good life of teaching for these seven teachers. While Chris and Danielle emphasized the “never enough time” aspect of their struggle for balance in their beginning years, I will explain how Molly, Patricia, and Saul, teachers with over 15 years of experience, explained in detail how the struggle in those years was inextricably linked to their understanding of the good life and yet the “struggle” changed over time.

Molly, Patricia, and Saul: “The struggle is different.” According to the seven teachers, the struggle of teaching *well* and the time they needed to do so did not disappear after their first years of teaching. Instead, all seven teachers described how it changed over time and became “different.” Importantly, with hindsight, Molly, Patricia, and Saul evidenced the practical wisdom that they developed through their beginning years of struggle. As a brief reminder, though Patricia did not describe her own struggle, she reflected on the time it took and how that time investment did change with experience. Therefore, in this section, I claim that their struggle to teach *well* was entangled and necessary in terms of how they lived the good life then—and even now as a transition between this section on the beginning years to the next section on post-National Board experiences.

First, Molly, a Math teacher with 20 years of experience, “put a lot of time into” teaching those first years, just as Chris and Danielle did. Molly explained to me that it was not a struggle that made her doubt her career in teaching, adding that “there wasn’t so much other stuff pulling

me away that I had that time to devote.” This was an important clarification that resonated with the other seven participants. In her reflection, she said that since her first years of teaching, she has had two kids, which changed the struggle—her life since her first years of teaching has indeed changed:

Then, I’m grading papers, I’m planning lessons, I’m planning three weeks in advance. We have no money. I can’t go do anything. It was like there was nothing else to do. So that’s what I devoted my life to, which is probably why now my family gets frustrated because I say I put too much time into my job and not into my family. So it’s a tough balance.

Molly interjected the “struggle” has since been that her “family gets frustrated” with her because she put “too much time into [her] job,” even after having kids.

Meanwhile, Chris explained his anticipation in changing his habits with “a kid on the way.” This life-stage shift forced Chris and Molly to reflect differently on the time they invested in teaching. While Molly claimed it was “tough balance,” she also attributed the “*too much* [emphasis added] time” to her family’s perception rather than her own—even after 20 years of teaching. In addition to life-stage shifts or personal commitments changing how Chris and Molly described their struggle to balance their priorities, Saul, a 20-year English teacher, and Patricia, a 15-year Math teacher, explained how they learned over time to create more balance and sustain teaching *well*.

First, Patricia claimed she did not struggle at all, but also explained how she clearly perceived a “divide” between new and older teachers in terms of how older teachers “find balance” easier, as she said:

Again, I feel like there’s kind of like an age divide because I feel like most people who have been in the profession maybe six or seven years or more at this point have found that balance. I think we’ve been doing it long enough again that we, going into a big idea or something, I feel like we are better able to judge how much time those things take. I feel like when I look at younger teachers a lot . . . you know, they’re teaching new

things, they have a lot of students, they have to figure out how to grade, they do have a part-time job, and they're trying to figure out.

Patricia empathized with the new teachers and later said “bless their little heart. It’s like, come on, you can grade papers on your couch at home. Like, go home.” She suggested “that balance” is possible only after about “six or seven years or more” of teaching because the discernment and understanding of “how much time things take” take time as well. Patricia implied that this sort of discernment only comes with practice and experience—the essence of practical wisdom. Saul reiterated that this reflective discernment that happens over time when he explained, “After year three, a lot of the administrative things get easier, you remember to stand at the door, you know? [Chuckles] during class changes. All that stuff kind of becomes innate and you begin to enjoy what you’re doing.” As Saul explained, the time investment in those first years helped “things get easier” such that “you begin to enjoy” teaching, even with notable lack of balance.

From their experiences, I claim that the lack of sustainability was obvious to all seven teachers in their beginning years, and they viewed it as necessary to learning how to “enjoy” (Saul) teaching and life a good life. Importantly, I learned that all seven teachers were aware that the “lack of balance” was going to have to change eventually, even though it was still “a tough balance” for Molly years later. As well, Chris viewed the struggle as “different” over time, but it was through that first struggle and time investment that *teaching* “got easier” (Saul), such as “figuring out” (Patricia) how to do the grading at home.

In the next section, I discuss my claim that as they became more accomplished in teaching *well* and managing the struggle of their time, the participants often pushed for more leadership, or were pushed to lead, beyond the classroom as well.

The Post-NBCT Years: The Push to Lead Before They Pull Back

In this section, I explain how these participants explained moving beyond the baseline of teaching *well* as a struggle, as I name it, in order to live the good life. To do so, I claim that all eight teachers pushed on to take leadership within the school, district, and state, especially after the National Board Certification—though two (Molly and Leigh) did not reference the NBCT process as their reason for launching into leadership. For the other six participants, becoming a National Board Certified teacher helped them to see that they could push for more in their leadership, including but not limited to teaching other adults *well*. These leadership opportunities were important to all eight teachers in this study to live the good life of teaching, regardless of the impetus for their pushing, or being pushed, into new roles of leadership.

Again, to be specific, six of the participants emphasized how their scope of leadership changed after their National Board Certification. In other words, six participants said to me that they learned—through the Board process—that they could be leaders and teach adults the way they had taught kids, in different levels beyond the classroom ($n = 6$). The other two teachers (not in the first six)—Leigh and Molly—mentioned the Boards were helpful in learning to teach *well*, but not instrumental in how or why they pushed for additional leadership in their own careers. Interestingly, these two teachers ended up in leadership opportunities completely *outside* the classroom due to an opportunity to be a Literacy Coach (Leigh) and having two young kids at home and becoming a part-time State-trainer/coach (Molly). For all eight teachers overall, however, their pushing—and being pushed—into more leadership was entangled in their own flourishing since leading other adults was a way of expanding their influence and scope of *teaching well*.

The Post-NBCT Years: Pushing and Being Pushed Into Leadership and Flourishing

To show how the Boards pushed the majority ($n = 6$) of these participants into leadership roles in addition to their classroom roles, I explain here how different teachers exemplified the way the Boards expanded, pushed, and launched them into multiple leadership roles at the school (Patricia and Alice), district (Danielle and Chris), and state (Ella) level. For them, these exciting roles—combined with teaching—were entangled in the good life of teaching *and* leading—at least for a while.

School level: Accomplishment led to extra responsibility. Whether initiated by other teachers, which Drago-Severson (2009, 2014, 2016) described as tapping for leadership, or self-directed, Patricia and Alice’s accomplishments in the classroom led them to flourish in leadership roles in which they took on more responsibility within their school by leading other teachers. Therefore, as I discuss next, Patricia and then Alice best represent how the other six teachers thrived off the accomplishment of earning their Boards and expanding their influence.

Patricia’s accomplishment. I learned that Patricia, a 15-year veteran Math teacher, described that passing the Boards in her fifth year of teaching “gave [her] accountability in conversations with veteran teachers” and “at the school level, opened up some opportunities for leadership.” She was “invited to join the school improvement team” and take a “big part” of other opportunities because of it. Since her introduction into school-level leadership over a decade ago, Patricia explained that her leadership vision and responsibility have deepened over time. In the last academic year, for example, she noticed more problems like “teacher turnover in [her] department.” Explaining that she believed she was ready to solve those problems, she felt “accomplished” in receiving the formal title of “teacher support coordinator.” She elaborated:

I will be the teacher support coordinator in our school next year as well, so that's something that for me personally I feel is an accomplishment. I'm really excited to work with not only beginning teachers but teachers who are new to our school and to our district to try to help support them and make sure that they have what they need to be successful and hopefully feel some of the accomplished feelings that I do.

Patricia's dedication and passion to "minimize" the turnover—a department-specific and school-wide issue—was evident. In fact, I learned from her that she had worked with administration in "trying to be as consistent as possible" to make sure teacher turnover did not negatively "affect student ability." With humility, she offered:

So I feel like we've tried really hard to minimize [turnover]. I don't think we have anybody in my department really. We have one person retiring but this will be the first year where I feel like we kind of have kept that intact, and I would like to think that it's partially because we've tried really hard to kind of push back against the challenge of the changing standards and being as consistent as possible.

Patricia's own leadership and her purpose in leading not only "new teachers but veteran teachers who are new to her school" show how she has taken her passion to see others succeed to the school-wide level of leadership. Important to her, too, was that this leadership was affirmed by her administration. Patricia explained how she has limited (i.e., pulled back) her leadership to this one role because she believed her leadership in her classroom was integral to flourishing: "I think that's when you begin to feel accomplished as well, when you actually have ideas that are good enough to be applied outside of your four walls." In essence, Patricia's accomplishments in the classroom were necessary to expand her scope so she could apply her passion, purpose, and new wisdom "outside of [her] four walls." Patricia's experience illuminated the general understanding of her accomplishments, urging her to expand her influence.

Next, I share how Alice, a 25-year veteran, explained how she also pushed to lead on the school level after the National Board Process and her years of experience made her feel more empowered.

Alice's self-directed push. Similar to Patricia's deep care about the morale and retention of other teachers in her school, Alice explained how her success in helping students in her classroom over time elevated her vision to the school level where she saw that "morale was going down the tubes" because of the "[principal] and the administration not handling things." I learned from Alice, a 25-year veteran English teacher, that this drop in school morale—soon after she passed her Boards—ignited her own purpose for leading a change. She explained how her "subversive activity" with other teachers began when one of her colleagues expressed that she might leave the school or "jump ship." She recalled the conversation as follows:

She said, "Hey, I'm thinking that some things are not really going the way we want it to. I'm thinking about possibly jumping ship and going elsewhere but I want to know if any of you think . . . like what do you think? Is the school worth saving? Are we at that point?" And so this conversation went back and forth for a day with all of us putting things in and I remember specifically saying, "I feel like jumping ship right now would be like leaving a marriage without going to therapy, at least trying." And somebody else in the group said, "That's a really good analogy and I agree with you." And so this was our therapy. It was like, "Okay, we're going to at least try to save the ship." So instead of going about it I guess honestly and upfront with the administration, we did things like trying to adjust the professional development and trying to find new pockets of leaders who would then become positive about the school and kind of grow the leadership roles at different age levels.

In response to the low morale and seeing everyone "just bitching," Alice and her colleagues not only found "new pockets of leaders" and tapped them to lead new professional development, but also decided to "set up a faculty gathering before school started," which she said "made a big difference." Alice explained that "subversive might sound too negative, but we knew what our agenda was . . . and so we felt it was important to maintain the culture of the school." Therefore, by using "backdoor channels," she explained that this is how she saw her "teacher leadership" at the school level. Like Patricia, she was "trying to keep young people and trying to develop the culture" because the administration was not solving the problems itself. Alice and Patricia showed me a deep care for the culture of their school and the retention of other

teachers through both formal (Patricia) and informal (Alice) roles, as all other participants did through varying leadership activities.

Although Patricia was tapped for leadership while Alice sought to create her own “subversive” changes, both teachers exemplified to me the push for leadership as entangled in the good life of teaching. They felt “fulfilled” (Patricia) and “made a big difference” (Alice) in their school-level influence. These additional purposes for leadership were entangled in the good life of teaching for them—which at that time was also true for Chris, who led the School Improvement Team; Danielle, who became department chair and led Safe-Zone training; and the other teachers who felt catapulted into school leadership during and after they earned their Boards. Next, I explain how several teachers ($n = 4$) expanded their leadership scope to the district level, which was entangled in their good life of teaching—at least at first.

District level: Teaching other teachers to teach *well*. In addition to school-level leadership, I claim that half the teachers in my study ($n = 4$) pushed their leadership and scope of responsibility beyond the school walls to evidence their practical wisdom, a necessary thread of the good life of teaching. Through their own struggles to teach *well*, which embodied their good life of teaching, Chris and Danielle expanded their accomplished practices beyond their school to the district (as did Saul and Molly). Because I highlighted Chris and Danielle’s beginning years of struggle, I chose them as the exemplar participants who—10 years later and at approximately 30 years old—best illustrated how district-level leadership and teaching other teachers to teach *well* were entangled in their good life of teaching. Danielle and Chris described how writing curriculum or leading workshops in their district and across their state—like Saul and Molly, who were more experienced teachers who also wrote curriculum and led workshops—gave them a fresh perspective on the importance of teaching *well* and leading other adults to do the same.

To describe this claim, I first discuss how Danielle took on curriculum writing for the district and how it helped her feel “recognized” for the strides she had made in connecting with and engaging her students by teaching *well*—much like Saul, Alice, and Chris.

Danielle: Lesson planning paid off. To show how Danielle’s leadership at the district level was representative of how the push to influence beyond the walls of the classroom was entangled in the good life, I describe her feeling of recognition in her ability to teach other teachers from the wisdom of her first years of struggle. First, Danielle, a 10-year ESL teacher, previously explained how half of her life was “lesson planning” during her first years as a teacher. Ever since, she said, she has been “revamping” the “online pacing guides” for the district for ESL, which was finally making her feel like her work was not just for herself or in vain. She explained:

I’ve written a couple for ESL level one because I work . . . I’m kind of specializing in newcomers in the past two years, and then I’m also writing curriculum for English 1 but for ESL students, so sheltered English one. So I think, yeah, that’s a good way to, I don’t know, it’s like you’re being . . . because I’m writing that stuff anyway for my classes. It’s like they’re recognizing me by paying me a little bit for that outside the classroom.

Danielle felt she “specializes” in ESL “newcomers” and so she described her leadership in being selected to write curriculum as the district “recognizing” her. She elaborated that she is “excited” to get feedback from other teachers and see how “translatable” the work she has done in her own classroom will help other teachers. Danielle’s district leadership was a “really cool concept” for her and allowed her to lead and teach other adults, which she realized made her feel a part of the community too, like when she led Safe-Zone training at her own school—while she was also writing district curriculum and acting as her department’s chair. For her, feeling “recognized” was important to her and entangled in the good life, just as it was for Saul, Molly, and Chris.

Next, I explain how Chris took his struggles from the classroom, like Danielle's struggle to make strong lessons for her ESL students when there were none, and that he viewed the challenges he faced as a classroom teacher as those that really helped him live the good life, especially when he was able to teach other teachers about the new, and better, curriculum he had developed.

Chris: *The challenges helped me.* Interestingly, while I learned that Danielle only started writing curriculum recently, Chris had begun writing for the district his first year of teaching, yet after the Boards, he took that learning to lead district trainings too. As a brief reminder, Chris, the Math teacher with 10 years of experience, did say that "being super-involved for [him] was so important." Therefore, although his first-year schedule was a "sink or swim" or "just throw you into the deep end and see what happens" sort of challenge with all low-level classes, he found the challenges "helpful" and pushed him to seek other opportunities to lead and help other teachers who were facing his same struggles. Because he "didn't like the curriculum," he applied to the district to rewrite the curriculum for his most challenging class. He explained that while some personalities might be like "All right, F this. I'm out. This is too much," he found the opportunity "helpful." He elaborated:

Now, I don't think that's necessarily like a good idea from like a policy standpoint because I don't know. If it was somebody with the wrong personality, that could defeat you really quick, but that challenge absolutely helped me. Like I said, I applied to write curriculum for that course and that's led to tons of opportunities professionally since then. So that was kind of a side benefit. But having to navigate through, "Well, this is what you got every day for the next hundred and eighty days," so I had to figure out how to work with it.

Chris reflected and saw that his schedule "could really defeat" some teachers, but it "absolutely helped" him. Even though Chris had only 1 year of experience and the job description for curriculum writing "asked for at least three years," he said it "was really helpful

for [him] to go all in.” Through this “curriculum-writing connection,” he became “a state trainer” for the same course. While Chris’s leadership expanded to the state level, he explained his passion was still on fundamentals of teaching and helping students, or as he described it, “one of the big pieces of the [state-level] course is using appropriate vocabulary and don’t rob kids of the actual vocabulary of math because you want to make it easy for them.” In other words, in making sure he was teaching other teachers best practices, he integrated these practices back into his own practice and felt more accomplished in his own classroom. This was the impetus for all eight teachers leading beyond their classroom, which was to help others to teach *well*.

Chris also explained to me how even his most challenging classes, students, and opportunities were “always fun.” In fact, he stated, “I don’t think challenging, frustrating and fun are mutually exclusive. I think things can be both of those things.” To him, the most important part of taking on leadership, even roles that could be “frustrating,” was the relationships with his students, which I explained in Chapter V was critical to his own flourishing as well as to that of the other eight participants. He elaborated that “I think it’s really fun now that I’ve been doing this for a while, that I have kids that I used to teach that I still talk to all the time. Like that is really fun.” Chris and Danielle, even though they only had 10 years of experience—the lowest in this study, showed that they cared so much about teaching *well* for their students and in their classrooms that they wanted to help other teachers beyond their school who might be facing similar struggles.

Leadership at the district level for Chris, as it was for the other six participants, was “cool” and “fun,” which are simple descriptors but ones that show how good they felt about the work. Their experiences were similar to the two veterans with more experience, like Saul and Molly who also described how they led state-wide workshops and trainings in their disciplines.

Their words specifically showed me how they loved “supporting” teachers in other districts and it was entangled, for them, in the good life too as they saw their wisdom expand to other adults.

Next, I show the greatest level of influence that these teachers pushed towards—state-level leadership. I selected Ella—The Ethical Edutainer/Activist to show how she has not just pushed but barreled through leadership roles in an effort to apply her wisdom and make sure she—and maybe more importantly to her, other teachers and students—live the good life across the state. Ella was one of four teachers ($n = 4$, Saul, Chris, Molly, and Ella) who led at the state level, but she best articulated a comprehensive account of her journey to this scope of leadership, which mirrored others.

State-level activism: Beyond plugging holes. As an important example, I learned that Ella’s push for leadership through teacher activism led her to continue to accept responsibilities in her school, district, and, eventually, in the state. While teacher activism is often discussed in the literature as an ideal next-step for driven teacher-leaders (Berry et al., 2013; Berry & Farris-Berg, 2016), Ella’s 25 years of experience portrayed the complexity of this aspirational role.

Importantly, Ella is one of four (half) participants who lead at the state level, but I selected her to show how much she thrived in her push at this largest scope of influence with other adults that include teachers and all other stakeholders in public education. For example, Ella’s leadership trajectory not only included creating a brand-new curriculum for her class this last year, but she also spent the last 4 years working with the State legislature on budget reform for public schools.

Ella, for example, explained that while she did the “school improvement thing” and “led workshops,” she realized she had been living in “blissful oblivion” to the system-wide issues. She elaborated during our interview:

I guess what I've found is I'm starting to just understand that a lot of the things that frustrate me about education are just bigger than the school level, it's systemic, and I'm not one who likes to play around the edges. And I just found a lot of the other leadership opportunities to be starting to feel like that, like, "Oh, we're plugging holes that need to be plugged," but nothing's changing that I care about. And so that's required me to work at a different level which isn't necessarily well-understood or recognized by the people I work with on a daily basis or the systems that track my progress.

Ella decided that her school-level work was just "plugging holes" and that what she cared about was not changing. Without seeing progress from her work solving problems on the school level, which she reflected upon based on her most recent year of teaching (AY 2-16-2017) as "play[ing] around the edges," she felt "required to work at a different level." In response, she started a nonprofit and took to teacher activism. Unfortunately, when she said that her work "isn't necessarily well-understood or recognized," she meant that "a lot of my leadership just isn't recognized or like on a teacher evaluation instrument." Interestingly, even though the State's teacher-evaluation tool does not "recognize" her leadership, Ella's eyes glistened when she started talking about the work and the relationships she has built at the legislature.

She reflected on teaching until 2013 as her "time of privileged oblivion in the sense of anything larger than my classroom or school level I was privileged to be absolutely oblivious." Then, she "woke up" or as she said:

I just finally woke up, like, "This is outrageous," and ever since then I've just been consistently relentlessly trying to persevere and figure out what buttons I can push to try and impact the policy discussion. But I got to say, I mean, I could go on for twenty hours about everything I've tried.

The excitement in Ella's voice as she confessed she could "go on for twenty hours" portrayed her unyielding enthusiasm in addition to her effort "relentlessly trying to persevere" in the face of state-wide political obstacles. While Ella believed her own commitment was "not very rational," she explained:

I don't know what I had to show in terms of actual accomplishments. Like I made a lot of noise, got a lot of attention, but in terms of if I want to point to something and say, "Well, I at least got that," I don't have that.

When Ella said "I don't have that," she was pointing to why she felt irrational in all of her effort in activism and how she understood the inaction of others. As a result of not being able to pinpoint an accomplishment beyond a few "new resources," Ella said she did not judge her "colleagues for not being more involved." In fact, she explained that as a teacher who goes to speak at events about school reform, she is "some kind of special unicorn" because "nobody knows of a real teacher" who does that work. She even laughed when she said, "No one wants to listen to a retired teacher" because her ability to retire is only about 4 to 5 years away.

Even though Ella explained how she "just went down to the legislature lobby and [she] was greeted like a hero," she reflected upon her own disillusionment with the lack of influence her leadership had:

And I'm like, in a way, that's just fantastic [regarding being treated like a hero], and in another way, you look at the budget and I'm having no impact. Everyone's nice to me, they'll meet with me, they'll say they want to work with me, but at the end of the day the people who I have good relationships with seem to have no impact or very minimal impact on the final budget.

As she and I discussed her disillusionment with "very minimal impact on the final budget," tears streamed down her cheeks to show her internal exhaustion. Then, as if stumbling upon a treasure, she began to talk about her classroom. In an instant, she switched gears and explained to me how her learnings at the state level had recently influenced her lesson plans. Immediately, she re-ignited her glowing, carefree smile. This quick and resilient transition echoes Lortie (1975) first assertion, almost half a century ago, that teachers are perceptive to their successes and disappointments in their classroom more than anything. Therefore, Ella delighted in describing the new problems-based lesson she called "exhibits," which she had created from scratch in

response to her own nonprofit's efforts and it being an election year. After describing the lesson in extraordinary detail, she concluded by saying:

I felt really good about that and it was cool, and we did that a lot this semester and at the end of the semester the kids were like, "We love exhibits because it's fun." Yeah, that's cool, and that's . . . I guess every so many years I'd totally change the way I teach and I'd say that's a new way in which I'll teach that'll roll me through the rest of my career.

The good life, for Ella, I learned, was explicitly her personal "growth" and pushing to lead and influence within and beyond the classroom. In this moment, as she described—and as reflected by Chris, Saul, and Molly, too—she experienced her own flourishing entangled in leading at the state-level and, subsequently, creating new lessons in her classroom.

Importantly, this "good" feeling did not replace her disappointment from not *necessarily* succeeding in her efforts to reform the entire state budget. In fact, Ella's expressed self-judgement and disappointment mirrored the Huberman (1989) Paradox, which explains the job dissatisfaction teachers experience when they expand their leadership efforts beyond school walls. As a result of Ella's state-level leadership, however, she explained how her discernment and critical praxis of where she focused her attention and how she centered herself back on the problems, or opportunities, "totally change[d]" in her classroom. This showed how her classroom struggle and leadership were entangled in her practical wisdom—a key thread of the good life, as it was for all eight teachers.

While it has been more than a decade since Little and Bartlett (2002) warned practitioners and scholars that there was "a mounting body of evidence suggesting [that] . . . reform both stimulates [a teacher's] enthusiasm and results in burnout" (p. 24), Ella's experience also affirmed Chris's previous point about "challenges and fun." In fact, Chris's assertion may be most salient for understanding how the teacher-leaders in this study understood flourishing

entangled in their own push for more leadership and influence. For Chris and Ella, as for all six other participants in this study, the two are not “mutually exclusive” (Chris).

In summary, all eight teacher-leaders in this study described and understood their pushing—and being pushed—into more leadership as entangled in their own flourishing since leading other adults was a way of expanding their influence and scope of *teaching well*, which they often then transferred to their own classrooms. Importantly, as my first research question focused on three distinct points in their career, I noticed that the scope of these teacher-leaders’ struggle expanded and grew more complex over time along with their leadership. Their *purpose* encompassed, first, teaching or helping students succeed at the classroom level (n = 8). Then, through reflection and critical praxis and reframing problems, these teacher-leaders developed in their leadership not only in the classroom but beyond to the school, district, and state level. Over time, however, in order to teach, lead, and live well, these teachers described learning to say “no” to leadership roles was entangled and crucial to their own flourishing.

In the next section, I discuss my claim that the priority of the participants’ time investment in their classroom suffered as a result of their pushing for more influence as school, district, and state leaders (n = 7). In essence, this is why exercising leadership was entangled with these participants’ flourishing.

The Pull Back: Saying “No” to Leadership to Balance Priorities

In this section, I discuss my claim that seven of the eight teachers expressed an implicit learning curve relative to their ability to balance their work and life priorities, especially in tandem with their increasing exercise of leadership. In previous section, I conveyed the ways in which these teachers were brought to life by pushing their passion and purpose beyond their classroom walls to lead other adults, but as I show here, it was not sustainable. In other words, in

light of their deepening practical wisdom, all eight teachers eventually pulled back and said “no” to current and new leadership opportunities. The exception to this claim was Patricia, who described her career as “balanced.” Meanwhile, I learned that the other seven participants had to learn to say “no” through small changes over time and, for Saul, Alice, and Ella, through the addition of a major life crisis. To illustrate the claim that the majority ($n = 7$) of the teacher participants learned over time to say “no,” I describe Chris’s, Leigh’s and Molly’s experiences as they showed the complexity of meaning making behind their reasons to say “no” that echoed the experiences of the other four participants (Ella, Alice, Danielle, and Saul).

I first describe Chris’s pulling back and saying “no” as a result of leadership infringing on his teaching well. Importantly, too, I highlight that I intentionally discussed Chris in each section to show a cohesive lived experience of the good life entangled in leadership.

“The number one priority, which is being a solid teacher.” As the first example of a teacher-leader saying “no” to assuming greater leadership in terms of the messiness of leading and teaching became too much, I illustrate Chris’s experience. As a brief reminder, Chris is a 10-year veteran Math teacher. For him, teaching and leading have always gone hand-in-hand as he has coached baseball and soccer (JV first, then Varsity) since his first year of teaching. After years of coaching and leading other teachers, Chris aptly applied his own practical wisdom in the last academic year by stepping down as chair of the School Improvement Team, a position he had held for a few years. He said it had all been “my decision.” For example, he explained:

I mean, all of the things that I’ve been involved in have been my decision, so it’s one hundred percent my fault. It’s not a burden that’s been placed on me . . . like If I was approached, I had to say yes. But I just know it’s time for me to do a little bit less as far as time is concerned so that the time I do spend is more on the number one priority, which is being a solid teacher.

Even though he had just described how he flourished after successfully implementing a new school-wide professional development system, Chris realized he had to “formally resign.” Emphasizing that he never felt pressure or thought the leadership role was a “burden,” it was just the conclusion he came to because of his own reflection and assessment of his “time.” He explained how this last year was “tough personally” and “just really hard” partially because of all his commitments. He elaborated on the struggles:

Grading is overwhelming. Again, there are just so many initiatives that are all well-intentioned but there’s no time, there’s just no time to breathe in any way as a teacher right now. It’s just like full-fledged sprint to try to do right by kids without much regard for the fact that teachers actually need time to learn, breathe, communicate, get on board.

Chris echoed himself when he said that “there is no time,” which is what he had said of his first years of teaching. With “so many initiatives,” Chris did not feel like he could “breathe” this last academic year (AY 2016-2017). Specifically, he said, “There’s just not time to breath in any way as a teacher right now,” again emphasizing how teaching *well* was integral to his understanding of the good life. His response to feeling like he was in a “full-fledged sprint to try to do right by kids,” he explained, was to press the “stop button.” His goal, again, was to “learn, breathe, communicate” in order to achieve his top priority and his original goal, which was to be a “solid teacher.”

Chris offered more context as to how saying “no” to an important and prestigious leadership role in his school was his best option to teach and live well—keeping in mind, of course, that Chris was still going to be committed to coaching Varsity sports. He said:

I feel like this last year I was not as good a teacher as I have been in the past. I powered through but I also, just personally, my life has changed. I’m married, I have a kid on the way, so I’m just not willing to dedicate as much time outside of the classroom as I was before. So going forward, I’ve got to figure out how to not let my product suffer but I also am not going to let the job take over my life outside of work. So at times I just said, “Okay, well, I’m pressing the Stop button. This is as much as I’m going to do in this endeavor for better or for worse.”

Chris's teaching *well* is his primary "product" and his description of lessening the "outside work" is a prime example of how all seven of the teachers in this study started saying "no" to responsibilities several years after their National Board Certification. Explaining that stopping was "for better or for worse" showed me that Chris felt he was compromising his high standards for himself in order to "not let the job take over [his] life," but that he understood now that he had to find a balance.

Saying "no" was the result of Chris's practical wisdom and critical reflection because he did not want to feel "overwhelmed" or "frustrated." Chris's response was to reflect on his priorities and to take "a step back . . . in hopes that that kind of frees up some mental energy and some time to really focus on [his] classroom again." Most importantly, he affirmed, "I'm not considering leaving. I still love teaching, but I know I'm emotionally closer to that point." Chris's final point was exceptionally relevant as his "love" for teaching, or his passion and purpose for the classroom and his students, are why he was "not considering leaving." He also told me that the extra leadership, however, was entangled in the good life he wanted for himself in that the sense of pride, responsibility, and accomplishment he had first sensed from leading the School Improvement Team had infringed on being a "solid teacher." As a result, the tasks he had mastered like "grading" or even "breathing" had become overwhelming to him and made him sense that he was "closer" to the point of leaving the profession than he had ever been before. Chris's awareness that he had moved "closer" to feeling burned out was echoed by Alice, Ella, and Molly at varying times during the interviews. Yet, they all followed up this confession with their solutions for how they were going to do things differently and pull back the next year.

In the next section, I describe how Molly's epithet as The Mother of Extremes and Leigh's epithet as The Leader of Learning epitomized why they said "no" to multiple leadership

roles. Much like Chris, whose epithet of The Crusader for Kids described wanting “do right by kids,” Molly, who has two kids of her own, claimed the students also as “my kids” and Leigh described needing more time to give her students “what they deserve.” Also similar to Chris, Leigh knew that she and her husband were trying to get pregnant, and as Chris had a baby on the way, Leigh was preparing for what that might mean for her time, attention, and priorities of a good work-life balance.

“I couldn’t devote as much of my time to my students.” Making the same choice to say “no” to leadership roles—both the old roles and the new roles administration was asking for them to begin, Molly and Leigh’s experiences offer powerful examples of how seven of the eight participants in this study pulled back and said “no” to leadership roles in order to continue living the good life. For example, Leigh explained that even her “workaholic husband, bless him” saw the increase in the work she was bringing home:

Realizing I was just bringing even more work home and, you know, even when my husband Sam [pseudonym] noticed it, I was like, “Oh, wait a minute. If he’s noticing something like this, then it really is becoming a problem,” and it’s just I felt myself . . . I mean, I just . . . I couldn’t . . . I was just . . . I felt that I couldn’t devote as much of time to my students that was needed and that they deserved.

Leigh described her students as her priority, which is why I chose her epithet of Leigh The Leader of Learning. She explained that when she reflected on her “extra duties as adviser, etc.” she said to herself, “No, I need to be . . . I’m a teacher first, and then these others come second.” In this way, Leigh—like Chris—caught herself before she became too overwhelmed or felt like quitting.

Similarly, Molly, explained that this last year was a year where she, too, felt more “beaten down” and “frustrated.” In addition to saying “no” to her administration when it asked her to lead graduation and organize the ceremony because she was already feeling near burned

out and “beaten down,” she also explained how she had learned to say “no” to the bad days of teaching. For her, saying “no” also meant not letting the bad days push her down. Instead, she had learned that to pull herself back into the good life of teaching, she would keep reminders of her students’ gratitude. In the following excerpt, Molly described how she tells “new teachers” to create a gratitude box of thank-you notes. She explained this and other strategies help her refocus on her priority of the students and help her survive difficult days:

I mean, it does scare me based on this year, like, “Oh my God, is this what it’s going to be like for the next ten years and am I going to survive?” But I always try to think positive and I’m hoping next year with our different approach because that’s where most of my energy goes and why I’m so excited. It’s trying to engage those kids, get them to come to school, to do anything outside of class, to pick up a calculator.

Molly’s “energy goes” to figuring out “different approach[es]” to help her students. They are her focus and why she, less than Molly and Chris, struggled less to say no. For her, it was clear that her priorities were with her kids, or as she emphasized, “*my kids*.” Interestingly, the struggle to teach *well* resurfaced even in the last academic year (AY 2016-2017) for Molly, Leigh, and Chris since their descriptions of their last year of teaching were full of words like “overwhelming” (Leigh) and “frustrated” (Chris).” But each of them went back to how they also “love teaching” (Chris), wanted to give their kids what they “deserve” (Leigh), and were “excited” (Molly) for the next year.

For all eight teacher-leader participants, their own flourishing came to life and was most visible to me when they explained how they took action to reprioritize their students as soon as they recognized the lack of balance in their career. As soon as they felt overwhelmed, they started saying “no” to leadership or anything “outside” the classroom. To Molly’s previous point, she decided “where her energy goes” and did everything she could to solve her problems so that she could “survive” and “engage kids” the next year. Importantly, for these four teachers, saying

“no” was a sign of their dedication to the good life of teaching, which in Chris’s words means “being a solid teacher.” As I mentioned previously, pushing forward and pulling back were all in an effort to maintain their priority and the baseline of teaching *well* for them to live the good life.

In the next section, I show how the three other teachers who struggled to find balance also learned through experiencing a personal crisis. I highlight what some positive psychologists call “post-traumatic growth” or the ability to see “good emerge from trauma” (Kashdan & Kane, 2011; McGonigal, 2015; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 455). Again, this is why the crisis, for these three participants, was not a discourager (Research Question 2) to their flourishing or good life but, to them, entangled or intrinsically connected in messy, layered, and complex ways to their flourishing.

Seeing Crisis as Opportunity for Change: The Quest for Balance Is Imperative

In this section, I discuss my claim that a crisis for three of these teachers, Saul, Alice, and Ella, was entangled in how they learned to live the good life—of teaching. Specifically, these three participants, with at least 20 years of experience, described events that radically changed their approach and framing of teaching and leading, and subsequently their own flourishing, at different points in their career. The three teacher-leader participants whom I highlight in this section showed me how the crisis they each faced was entangled in the struggle to teach *well* and the lack of balance to do it all. Though hospitalization (Saul), breakdowns (Alice), and divorce (Ella) would, at first, seem like reason enough to quit teaching, especially when all signs point to teaching *as the cause* of their trauma, these teachers saw it as an opportunity for change in their good life—of teaching. Still, for Saul, Alice, and Ella, they explained that crisis was a direct result of their own decision making, but these times illuminated their practical wisdom and opportunities to change.

To be clear, in the participants' own words, the personal crisis was "hospitalization" for Saul in the beginning years. For Alice, she described a "funk that led to a downward spiral" after National Board Certification Renewal. Finally, Ella explained the trial of her divorce during her National Board Certification and the recent "crisis of faith" she has faced in her own good work. In Saul's own understanding, his major trauma caused him to "redefine" his relationship with school in order to center the importance of finding "a more healthy balance" early in his career. Alice described that her equation of who she was as a person radically shifted from how she "equaled" teaching to "family [was] greater [to her] than [her] job." Interestingly, Ella had a unique and somewhat discrepant experience because even though the crisis of her divorce in the midst of applying for the National Board was as traumatic as the other two, she did not pull back drastically to "redefine" her relationship with teaching the way Saul and Alice did. Instead, of reintegrating *life* into the work-life balance, Ella reflected on her crisis as an opportunity to "work harder," which I explain at the conclusion of this section.

Importantly, each of these three teachers described and understood themselves to flourish *overall* in their careers and during the three distinct points of their beginning years, their National Board Certification years, and recently despite (if not because of) or absolutely entangled with these crises. Still, their crises were discrepant experiences that I want to highlight were drastically different from the incremental learning all eight teachers in this study experienced.

First, I describe Saul's hospitalization and subsequent re-defining of his work-life balance, as he understood this experience to be critical to how he taught, lived, and led well the rest of his career.

Saul becomes flexible. First, I claim that Saul deepened his practical wisdom of living the good life in an accelerated fashion, or through "post-traumatic growth" (Tedeschi &

Calhoun, 1996, p. 455) due to being hospitalized in his early years of teaching. In other words, I learned that Saul—The Steady Problem Solver described that his 4-day hospitalization during his third year of teaching was an opportunity to learn how to be more flexible with his approach to teaching *well*. As with “post-traumatic growth” (p. 455), Saul’s response to getting hospitalized was similar to cancer patients who survive their illness (p. 457); they both walk away from that time and believe they are stronger and more self-assured after the experience than they were before.

To do so, Saul explained how his “A-type personality” and personal standards were “unreasonable at times,” and led him to “work [himself] into several ulcers” in his third year of teaching. Saul had prided himself and his six brothers and sisters on the fact that they had never missed a day of school. All of them held “perfect attendance,” so to miss “four days” was a big deal. He elaborated on the experience and the way he reflected during that time:

I was hospitalized for four days and I recognized during that time that I had to change the way I see a professional life because you can’t work all the time, and I had to remind myself of that even now twenty years into my career because I’ve been working on my project for grad school, gosh, probably the last three days, twenty hours, probably, you know? And I’m on spring break. Why am I doing that? But that’s just I have a standard that I want to meet. But that was tough.

Saul described how he “had to remind himself” to be more “flexible” as he found himself even “working on [his] project for grad school” during his own spring break around the time of our first interview for this dissertation in March 2017. His personal reflection was that he “had to change the way [he] saw a professional life” and he could not “work all the time.” In fact, Saul elaborated even more on how his hospitalization radically shifted his mindset and said that he learned:

if I didn’t change the way I interacted with work, I was going to literally kill myself. I couldn’t do that, right? And so I redefined how hard I was going to work . . . trying to find a more healthy balance with school.

Saul said “[he] was going to literally kill myself” if he did not “change the way he interacted with work.” Eventually, Saul explained that he changed radically “Because I had to change me to be a successful teacher.” Having a career as a “successful teacher” was important for him, so he never thought of quitting. Instead he said, “By the fourth year I loved it. I loved it. And I liked it a lot in the first three, but I loved it after the fourth one. I actually didn’t consider doing anything else after that.” Saul’s devotion to the job only increased in tandem with his “eye-opening” and re-balancing of his life after being in the hospital.

Next, I explain how Alice, like Saul, used the crisis to re-evaluate her life choices and find a better approach to teaching and living well as she taught well.

Alice advocates for herself. In this section, I discuss what I learned from Alice—The Audacious Actress/Advocate about her personal and emotional “breakdown” that made her re-evaluate how she framed and balanced teaching with her personal life. Specifically, Alice explained that she did not “know if [she] had a breakdown,” but right after she renewed her National Board Certification and won Teacher of the Year in her school, she “really struggled.” Unlike Saul, Alice experienced this crisis after almost a decade of teaching, while Saul’s crisis was in his third year. She explained the scenario as follows:

And it was the month before my sister’s wedding and I was supposed to go to Richmond for a bridal shower for her, and I called her and [my husband] took me to the doctor. I just . . . I really did kind of fall apart, like, “What am I doing?” I am bringing up my children, my biological children. I’m not doing anything in the classroom. I’m crying. I’m like, “Why am I here?” I wasn’t suicidal, but I was in a funk that I could not get out of. So I don’t know if one led to another or if they just happened to be of the same time period or I don’t know. But it was bad there for a while.

Alice recalled this “funk” that was “bad for a while” did not push her to the point of being “suicidal,” but she questioned her very existence. While it may not have been related to the

Boards at all, she said that she went from “one extreme to another” with her emotions, and as she tried to make sense of it, she said:

And so I think part of my transition was I had to let out—I felt like I’d been keeping in just all this questioning and doubt and frustration, and I think as women we take on whatever’s going on with our significant others or families and parents and everything and we just keep on going. That’s what we do. We fake it till we make it. And I think it just all came tumbling out and I think that tumbling-out process was exhausting. I remember just being almost like I was drunk, in a haze for a while, and then once I got out of that it was like on the upswing pretty quickly again.

Alice’s “fake it till we make it” mentality was a repeated expression throughout our interviews. I learned that it was from this “just keep going” mindset that she had learned to be a sort of “actress” and how she could “fake [her] way” through almost anything. According to her, this was true of her teaching, too. As a result of “tak[ing] on everything,” and “keep on going,” she explained she sometimes would “lose herself” in teaching and would “look up and realize the day was over.” In her own words, Alice habitually is “tunnel visioned” and:

teaching is great in that you don’t have time to think about your own personal things. There are thirty-two kids in front of you that need something and in eighty-three minutes those kids are going to move and you’ve got another. And it’s not a very good profession because I think for you to look up and you’re not looking like, “Oh gosh, when it’s going to be lunch?” you look up and the day’s over and you’re exhausted and there’s no time to think about the things in your life, and so when you ask, “And what about yourself? There is no yourself.”

Alice’s statement “And what about yourself. There is no self” showed how had lost her sense of self completely in the act of teaching, and she had finally come to wonder if that was okay with her and how she wanted to live—and live well. Apparently, Alice’s “spiral,” “funk,” or “breakdown” were the crises that forced her to process “all the questioning and all the doubt” which finally “just all came tumbling out.” She explained how “I think that tumbling-out process was exhausting.” In fact, she realized in her own reflection:

What I had written was “family equals family, job equals job, family is greater than job,” and I don’t know that I could have said that before when I was in a different place.

This experience for Alice, as she described, put her in a “different place” where she saw herself and her family were finally becoming “greater than job.” Prior to this “haze” experience, Alice explained that no matter how stressful work was, she would “hold it together all day long” in front of her students until she got home, where she would “take out what [she’d] been bottling up all day inside and take it out on whatever is at home.” In the worst of times at school, however, she never considered quitting, or as she explained:

Isn’t that crazy? But it was almost like I was ready for my family to quit me or for me to walk away from my family more than I was ready to quit teaching. How crazy is that?

The interesting twist here, for Alice, was that the more she was publicly affirmed as a teacher, the more “mentally tired” and more “crazy” for teaching she became. She described that part of this was because she tried to live up to her own standards, much like Saul had previously explained. She expressed too she had that “Teacher of the Year junk hanging over my head.” For her, these accolades incited “more questions and doubts” until she finally broke and reprioritized.

Importantly, as she explained, “once I got out of that, it was like on the upswing pretty quickly again.” Relative to her own “post-traumatic growth” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 455), for Alice, her value of herself and her relationship with her family was a near-instant turnaround, a change common post-traumatic growth change, according to research—but only common in 25% of victims (p. 457). Through this re-evaluating of her time and her life, Alice explained that her breakdown helped her learn to advocate for her own balance to not only teach well but also to live and lead her family well.

Next, I explain how Ella’s crisis was on its own island of uniqueness as it propelled her to be more entangled in leadership and teaching, but how for her this was the good life. She, like Saul and Alice, framed their reactions in ways that aligned with “post-traumatic growth” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 455) or seeing trauma as an opportunity for positive change.

Ella has faith. Unlike Saul and Alice who radically pulled back and invested more time in themselves and their personal relationships, Ella embraced her profession even more because of her personal trials. Similar to Alice’s self-proclaimed “crazy” notion that teaching was more important than her family for a short time, “teaching is an addiction,” according to Ella. In this section, I explain how Ella described her own personal crisis “of faith” as a catalyst for her to keep pushing for her leadership and for her profession of teaching overall. To Ella, teaching is the good life, period. In other words, I would venture to say that for her, *teaching well* was, without any qualifications and with all its entanglements, the essence of living well, regardless of extra factors like well-being, work-life balance, and so on.

When I directly asked her during our final interview, how, if at all, she felt well-being or if that would be a word she would consider as part of her teaching, she said:

Oh no. [Laughs] But, I mean, I have to acknowledge that there’s very little time in my entire teaching career I felt like I had well-being. To me well-being means balanced, and there’s nothing about me and teaching that involves balance. [Instead, teaching involves,] working way too hard all the time, [chuckles] usually at the expense of my family and my personal health.

While Ella claimed and described herself as flourishing, her “very little time” experiencing “well-being” to the “expense of [her] family and [her] personal health” caused me to wonder if her subjective perspective of her own flourishing was possible or maybe an illusion. Instantly, she claimed her own “irrationality” and “unicorn” status as a way of admitting it was an illusion she lived fully and knowingly.

She explained how she realized as a “young teacher” that she would need to do her National Board Certification before she had kids because she was already working too hard to think about anyone other than herself, or as she described:

I remember being a young teacher with no children looking at the moms who were teachers and being like, “Do you know what you’re making for dinner tonight?” It would

amaze me. They were like, “Yeah, we’re having this and such and the meat is already thawing, and I bought all the groceries and I folded all the laundry.” And I’m just like, “How?” [Laughs] I was spending every minute of every day taking care of myself and teaching and I knew that there would be like one or more other human beings who depended on me for their nutrition and survival. It just made no sense.

Ella explained how she was “spending every minute of every day” trying to take care of herself so she could teach *well*, such that the future projection of having her own kids depending on her “made no sense.” Her experience was just like that of Chris and all the other teachers who struggled their first years to find time to do everything, but much to Ella’s surprise, her husband asked for a divorce before she even started her National Board Process, which made the time struggle for kids moot, at least temporarily.

She described how “I didn’t realize my marriage was failing until it was probably too late. But then, once I realized it, I was like, ‘Oh, well, I’m going to solve this problem.’ [Chuckles].” While Ella “was feeling like [they] had made progress” through counseling, she discovered her own naiveté:

And so that fall—this tells you something—I was assigned to go on weekend trips with my husband as homework, and on these weekend trips I was not allowed to work. So I wasn’t supposed to grade papers in the car, on the way there or on the way back. And it almost killed me, because I always have so many papers that need grading and that’s just sitting in car time. But if you grade papers, you’re not talking, so yeah, that’s the problem with that. So we stopped at an Applebee’s off of I40 and I remember saying, “Oh, this is so great! I’ve got my master’s out of the way, after this year I’ll have my National Boards out of the way, so maybe this summer we can start trying to start our family.” And my husband’s face just went totally white. I was like, “Oh. That’s not the response you’re supposed to have when you tell your husband you could start a family.”

Ella’s husband’s response to her life “plan” was “Yeah, this actually isn’t working for me,” and it blindsided her. She described his shock by describing how her “husband’s face just went totally white.” Interestingly, her response to him was just “oh,” while her response to not being allowed to grade papers in the car “almost killed” her.

All three participants—Saul, Alice, and Ella—mentioned the idea of nearly killing themselves due to their personal crisis, such that Saul’s ulcers literally hospitalized him, and Alice’s not-exactly suicidal thoughts showed how she needed to care for her own mental health from working too hard, and Ella’s fear of *not* working. “almost killed [her].”

In accordance with her prioritization of teaching, Ella explained that she quickly made peace with the divorce, or as she said, “he was not my first love . . . my first love is teaching.” She elaborated:

In fact, my first marriage failed largely because it became clear to my husband that I was not his first love. Well, he was not my first love. My first love is teaching, and I would sacrifice and do whatever needed doing to make sure that my lessons were great and that it was great as I could get them. I thought they were great. Looking back, I’m not so sure. But, and that the kids were getting quality feedback on their work. And I mean, unfortunately, his love language was quality time and that doesn’t really happen with a fully integrated teacher who is a teacher all the time.

Ella’s identity was, as she shared, as a “fully integrated teacher” or, as she later described, a “true believer” in the purpose and mission of public education to elevate an “educated democratic citizenry.” It is important to note that North Carolina law requires a year of separation before a divorce can be finalized. While Ella did mention that this separation was “painful” as she was in this “big house all by [her]self,” Ella moved on quickly.

Ella explained that the majority of her attention during the time of her divorce was on the National Boards, which were “a great distraction.” She explained she was “functionally dysfunctional.” While she said she had a lot of support from friends and colleagues, she thought back and asked herself, “How’d I even do that? I don’t even know.”

Ella’s commitment and work ethic towards teaching, however, did not change after her divorce, but she became even more dedicated. She explained that her “leadership in the school peaked soon after” she passed her Boards and finalized her divorce. Additionally, she later got

remarried, and despite her own disbelief that she could manage “other human beings who depended on [her] for their nutrition and survival,” she also had two kids of her own.

Again, Ella’s response to the divorce was unlike Saul’s and Alice’s reactions to their own personal crises, which was to reprioritize and balance their own physical or mental health with teaching *well*. Instead, I observed how Ella decided to work twice, if not three times as hard “to pull it off.” For Ella, “it” was not just teaching *well* but teaching her “masterpiece.” For example, in her last year of teaching, she explained that she was not only working hard to “support her family,” but also took on a new class, which teachers call “preps.” Then, on top of that extraordinary commitment, she continued her teacher activism through protesting and leading her colleagues with her nonprofit for state-wide reform. In her own words from our interview, which resonated with her lived experience that I observed in the documentary about her life, she explained:

The only way I pull it off is getting up at three-thirty in the morning and I just don’t know many people who want to get up at three-thirty in the morning every day to be an advocate for their profession. “And what do I have to show for it? I mean, not a lot.”

Ella’s immediate answer to her own question of “What do I have to show for it?” as in “What do I have to show for waking up so many extra hours early?” was “not a lot.” Still, despite the lack of tangible rewards, Ella did not question her priorities or slow down her work ethic. She pushed forward and explained why:

Because it’s really important and I know that it’s right. If there’s a God in heaven, he wants all kids to be educated. Like, I just know that. So I just don’t understand why this is so hard.

At this moment in our last interview, tears streamed down Ella’s face as she said with passion, “I know it’s right.” Two moments later, her daughter brought her a tissue and sat next to her mom, staring up at her with abundant love. This is why she has persisted.

From my view, Ella's personal crisis of her divorce in the midst of her National Board Certification was an opportunity to work harder as a leader in her classroom and at her school. Her marriage was a difficult but worthy sacrifice because she believed it was her job to make sure "all kids are educated." She explained that when she most recently had a "crisis of faith" and asked God what she should be doing, she felt Him answer her:

It's the same damn message every time, which is just keep going, Ella, just keep going. [Sobs] But it's so hard that I just . . . I feel like I'm being asked . . . there's a lot of faith at work here, there's a lot of faith. And I look at my children and you'll see this in the movie and it's so clear on the screen, like how distracted their mom is and how busy I am, and so often they want me to do something and I'm just like, "I just don't have time." At some point, it just doesn't seem right. It doesn't seem right. So, I don't know. I don't know. I just got to have faith. That's what I'll always do. I just got to have faith. And I say these exact words in the movie and it still is true today as it was before and just every night when I lay my head down, like I know I did the best I can do.

Ella's "faith" and self-affirmation that she has done "the best" she can has kept her going for over 25 years. This response was similar for Alice and Saul, who described that "keeping going" was the only option for the good life for them too, with just a few adjustments. At the same time, Ella admitted, "I still don't know how sustainable it is." She then paused, grabbed another tissue, and laughed as she said with a bit of sarcasm entangled with joy and sorrow, "Right now as I'm crying in July." In the midst of her tears and in her living room *and* while folding laundry, Ella referred to "the exact words" she had stated in the documentary a year prior to our conversation almost as a re-affirmation of her unbreakable faith.

Even in her 25th year of teaching, Ella repeated the point that all seven teachers made about their first years of teaching *well* and doubting their ability to "sustain" their commitment over time. Is this good work of teaching, leading and living *well* sustainable? The answer Ella and all the participants gave was a yes and a no. Although there is not enough room in this dissertation to share all their stories of struggle and triumph that Ella, Saul, and Alice conveyed,

they sustained in the midst of struggle and they were going to “keep” doing it. For Ella, as for Saul and Alice, her commitment and love of her work as a teacher was clear—it was her good life because it was the “best” she could do.

While these teachers faced extreme personal struggles, physically and mentally, they experienced what researchers have called post-traumatic growth (Kashdan & Kane, 2011) or the ability show resilience and reinvigorated well-being after trauma. Although each of them claimed to have “persistence” (Alice and Saul) and “faith” (Ella) that propelled them forward in their work, their words showed me how their reflective process or growth in discernment and practical wisdom helped them not only survive but also continue to live, teach, and lead well—at least in their own understanding.

In other words, it would be possible to read the events of Saul’s, Alice’s, and Ella’s lives with additional psychosocial lenses of grit, or the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007b). Additionally, their ability to function could be described as resilience, which Bonanno (2004) described as:

the ability of adults in otherwise normal circumstances who are exposed to an isolated and potentially highly disruptive event, such as the death of a close relation or a violent or life-threatening situation, to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning. (p. 20)

Since both terms are more modern and frequently discussed concepts relative to the psychological and social-emotional learning in public schools today, I would consider these and the developmental literature on internal capacities (see Chapter II) as viable lenses to interpret how Alice, Saul, and Ella persisted. Still, through my dissertation lens and considerations of flourishing, I contend that these three teachers showed practical wisdom (Higgins, 2011; MacIntyre, 2007). To me, their discernment and decision making in light of the push and pull of leadership ($n = 8$), the struggle for balance ($n = 7$) or the framing of personal crises—not as

traumas—but as opportunities (n = 3) illuminated how frequently all eight teachers assessed how their actions aligned with their values. Specifically, as I learned, their number one value was teaching, and teaching *well*—a baseline to the good life of leading and living *well*, too.

Chapter Summary

In review, I learned that teaching *well* for all eight participants was their baseline for the good life, so that they could *lead well* too (n = 8). Most importantly, I discussed how “struggles” of leadership, in addition to teaching well and finding balance, were entangled with the good life of teaching (n = 7).

Although Patricia explained that “time management” was always her strength, for the other seven participants, discernment in their priority of their teaching over time, or practical wisdom, helped them learn how to manage the push and pull of leadership (Baltes & Staudinger, 2000; Halverson, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996; Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006; Wallace, 1988). In fact, as they refined their “phronētic eye” (Halverson, 2004, p. 4) or ability to make decisions about how their own behaviors were “impacting others” and, most importantly, their selves, they learned to say “no” to some leadership (n = 8). In essence, they refined their leadership to return to their main purpose of teaching *well* even after their NBCT status, an accomplishment that propelled them to teach other adults beyond their school walls (n = 6). To me, the most interesting participant of the three (Saul, Alice, and Ella) who experienced “post-traumatic growth” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, p. 455) from a personal crisis was Ella, whose faith “to do the best [she] can do” most illuminated the heart of how all eight teachers lived, taught, and led well—thus *constantly* in the struggle and in the tension of becoming flourishing teachers.

In the next chapter, I offer a summary of my dissertation by reviewing the participants and their context, the findings within the analytic chapters, and the major conclusions, implications, and recommendations for policy, practice and research.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I offer a summary of conclusions from my dissertation and discuss the implications and recommendations for research, practice, and policy. The focus of my study with eight teacher-leaders from Wake County, North Carolina in secondary schools was to learn from them how, if at all, they describe and understand their own flourishing at three distinct points in their career, i.e. their beginning years, their National Board Certification years, and most recently (AY 2016-2017).

I chose this burning research question as the focus of this dissertation to address the actuality of teacher turnover (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Perda, 2013; Strauss, 2015), the coming teacher shortage crisis (Berry & Shields, 2017; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Sutchter et al., 2016), and the public discourse that emphasizes burnout in the profession overall (Chang, 2009; Edelman, 2016; Goldstein, 2015; Przybylska, 2016; Santoro, 2011). These purposes are important to educational leaders because principals are depending more and more on the “sleeping giant” of teacher-leadership (Crowther, 1997; Drago-Severson, 2016; Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Sebastian, Allensworth, & Huang, 2016) to actualize school change. Logically, increased turnover makes cultivating strong teacher-leaders more challenging. While these problems are far-reaching across the nation, I wish to emphasize that the findings of my study are not generalizable beyond these eight participants (Maxwell, 2013).

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I review the *where* and the *who* of this study regarding the context and the participants—including whose voices I believe are missing from this study. Then, I remind readers of the *what* and review the major findings from the analytic Chapters V, VI, and VII. Next, I connect these findings to the *why* or the conclusions, implications, and recommendations. In other words, I explain why I think my research adds value to policy, practice and research.

The recommendations tied to conclusions and implications and based on my findings and claims in the analytic chapters are as follows:

1. Policymakers need to re-story excellence, meaning create committed teacher pipelines, incentivize reflective development, and expand measures for excellence beyond measures of quality and effectiveness to include flourishing. These recommendations stem from my conclusion that all eight participants found purpose, passion, and practical wisdom instrumental in their preparation and ongoing development and underrepresented in their evaluations (n = 8, see Chapters V, VI, and VII).
2. Practitioners need to re-center relationships, that is, school leaders and teachers need to carve out spaces for “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) such as the Pillar Practices, employ a developmental lens to help adults develop the skills and internal capacities it takes to deepen relationships with students and colleagues, and encourage ongoing dialogue and reflection of ethical relationships with students and colleagues as the heart of teaching. I derived these recommendations from the fact that all eight participants

highlighted the long-lasting relationships with colleagues and students as vital to their own flourishing and good life (see Chapters V and VI).

3. Researchers need to reframe the tides of leadership, meaning they need to question the flow, the rhythm, the push, and the pull of the “tragic dilemma” (Higgins, 2011, p. 52) or tension between the self and other that is inherent in teaching—a highly-demanding helping profession—and in leading adults and/or initiatives, which is equally demanding. I offer multiple questions to consider in light of my conclusion that the practical wisdom I saw in all eight teacher-leaders which helped them to teach, lead, and live *well* (n = 8) is poorly understood, as turnover is on the rise despite our abundance of teacher job satisfaction data (see Chapter VII).

Finally, I end with a mode of teacher-leader flourishing, which is actually the *how* or how to begin again. In essence, I believe there are several possible next steps to explore here at the intersection of teacher-leadership and flourishing. First, I review the *where*, or context, and the *who*, the participants of this study.

Review of Context and Participants: The *Where* and The *Who*

In this section, I describe the context and participants of my study. To do so, I review how I selected the *where* and *who* of my study and offer an executive summary of the eight participants’ narrative summaries, or integrated interpretations of who the participants are based on their own words and my understandings as the researcher (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). I end this section with a reflection of whose voices were missing and whose were abundantly present in this study because both the silences and the coincidences are important to consider before reading the conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

The Where: The Context of the Participants

As a reminder, I selected these participants based on key similarities, grounded first and foremost on the geographic criterion that all the teachers taught in Wake County Public Schools. Additionally, all of them were North Carolina Teaching Fellows (NCTFs) and National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) and had at least 20 years of experience. The NCTF program provided a fully funded college education to top-performing high school students who agreed to teach in the state for 4 years after graduation. In addition, the state gives a 12% raise to those who earn National Board Certification, which is an accomplished teaching certification that teachers can earn after submitting a portfolio of their teaching with reflections of their practice.

Importantly, I chose the state of North Carolina and Wake County in particular because it has more NBCTs than any other district in the nation (wcpss.net, 2016). Plus, I found from my participants, prior research, and the National Board liaison of Wake County that through their Beginning Teacher program and other structures around the NBCT process, Wake County Public Schools encourages teachers to find and build collegial connections during their teaching career. These relationships resonate with Drago-Severson's (2009) research that identified Pillar Practices (i.e., mentors, teams, collegial inquiry groups, and leadership opportunities) which can be implemented with developmental intentionality and serve as holding environments.

Rationale for context. My rationale for selecting teachers from these two programs was that I believed the two programs provided opportunities for teachers to take part in relationships that might mirror developmentally intentional holding environments, or spaces where adults feel “well held” and “honored” in who they are in order to take risks for their own growth (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965).

I also wondered which teacher-leaders might be *most likely* to flourish. I considered that there were teachers who might flourish and those who do might have stayed in the profession beyond the typical 3-5 year turnover mark (Perda, 2013). Then I considered how the teachers who stayed in the profession even after experiencing the Great Recession of 2007-2009 (Rich, 2013) might have something to important say about their work in light of pay freezes and the downturn in the overall economy—especially if they stayed and led beyond their classrooms through getting Board Certified. Then, finally, I considered the most recent political transitions in 2013, which caused major education-spending cutbacks in the state to make North Carolina one of “worst places to be a teacher,” according to the WalletHub’s study cited in the *News and Observer* (Hui, 2017, par. 1). If teachers not only stayed but also led long-term in their schools, even after these major benchmarks which caused a teacher exodus across the nation and especially in North Carolina (Speaks, 2014; State Board of Education, 2015), then I wanted to learn from them. My central question was: How, if at all, do you flourish?

This is how I came to the pool of participants, from which eight agreed to the invitation. I describe these eight teacher-leader participants next.

The Who: A Review of the Eight Teacher-Leader Participants

To learn how, if at all, teacher-leaders might flourish, specifically in reflecting upon the three distinct periods of their career where mass exodus has been most likely according to research—i.e., the beginning years, after Year 4 (when teachers are eligible for NBCT), and most recently (AY 2016-2017), I asked eight teachers in Wake County who fit the criteria mentioned above. In Table 25, which I also included in Chapter IV but repeat here for convenience, I list each participant’s pseudonym, epithet (mini-title that captures their internal case theme), sex, race/ethnicity, approximate years of experience, school (pseudonym), and content area.

Table 25

The Final Eight Participants

Pseudonym	Epithet	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Approx. Years of Experience	Pseudonym School	Content Area
Molly	The Mother of Extremes	Female	White	20	Riverdale	Math
Alice	The Audacious Actress Slash Advocate	Female	White	25	Lakewood	English
Danielle	The Defender of Intellect	Female	White	10	Green Forrest	ESL
Saul	The Steady Problem- Solver	Male	White	20	Castle View	English
Ella	The Ethical Edutainer/Activist	Female	White	25	Lakewood	Humanities
Leigh	The Leader of Learning	Female	White	15	Blue Valley	English
Patricia	The Perseverant Pedagogue	Female	White	15	Riverdale	Math
Chris	The Crusader for Kids	Male	White	10	Riverdale	Math

As the table shows, all participants were White and taught at five different schools with a variety of content area expertise. In the next sections, I describe who the individual participants were relative to the first research question. In Appendix K, I offer brief reviews of their narratives with my interpretation in addition to a table of their own words without my interpretation indicating about how they believed they flourished throughout their career.

Next, I explain whose voices were present overall and whose voices were missing within this eight-person group of participants.

The Who: A Reflection of Who Was Missing and Who Was Here

In this section, I describe the voices absent from these participants in addition to a few interesting commonalities that are important when considering the conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

Overall, the eight White teacher-leaders in this study all claimed that they flourished in each point of their career, which to me was the most exciting finding. Notice, this is the first time since the methodology section in Chapter III that I highlight their race/ethnicity in conjunction with their flourishing. To me, the homogeneity within this study points to the potential for readers to not have noticed or questioned the absence of voices of people of color. Importantly, I believe this is one of the greatest shortcomings of this study. In addition, I believe it opens up the opportunity for future studies to discern how, if at all, people of color or different ethnic/cultural backgrounds would describe and understand their own flourishing, if they do at all.

As previously mentioned in the methodology chapter, I did not have access to the potential pool of participants' demographic information when I invited them to my study, so despite my effort to use snowball sampling or learn by word of mouth and have additional personal connections with the current participants (Creswell, 2013) to increase the diversity of my sample, especially in terms of race/ethnicity, I had limited time to pursue this fully and find teachers from communities of color. As a result, there are no voices of color in this dissertation, which I find to be an important voice missing from my findings, my claims, my conclusions, and my recommendations.

Instead, I was pleased to have diversity among the participants in terms of gender, with two men; sexuality, as one participant, Danielle, was bisexual with a same-sex partner; and a variety of career stages ranging from the 10-year to the 25-year mark. Interestingly, too, six of the teacher-leader participants had parents who were teachers and two of the participants were first-generation college students, as mentioned in their Narrative Summaries in Chapter VI. Additionally, three of the participants returned to their home district to teach before teaching in

Wake County, and all of them mentioned how Teaching Fellows bolstered their desire to teach, even when the desire was “already there” (Molly, Chris, and Leigh) before they entered college.

In light of these overall similarities in the voices of the participants and the absence of voices of color, the conclusions I derived are only internally generalizable. Still, I believe the findings are worthy of review as they offer the beginning of an understanding of how teacher-leaders *might* live the good life or teach, lead, and live *well* today.

In the next section, I review the findings in the three analytic chapters (Chapter V, Chapter VI, and Chapter VII) that emerged from the interviews, through a cross-case analysis, with NBCT and Teacher of the Year documents, a documentary, and the literature I examined for my dissertation study.

Review of Findings: *What I Learned*

In this section, I offer a brief review and reminder of the key findings from the previous analytic chapters. To do so, I first underscore that the focus of this dissertation was on my first research question. Then, I summarize the findings in Table 26 so I can explain why these claims are important to policy, practice, and research.

What Is So Important About Research Question 1

First, I spent the entirety of this dissertation answering the first research question of how, if at all, the eight participants in my study understood their own flourishing at three distinct points in their career. I made this decision after checking in with my first two readers, who agreed that the first research question could be the entire focus of this dissertation, although my interviews also covered the second and third research questions. I suggested this focus as I learned from the participants that this is an exceedingly rich topic ($n = 8$) and this dissertation barely scratches the surface of my findings. In fact, in the process of analyzing and writing my

findings, I scrapped the original three chapters in light of the complexity of *seeing* passion, purpose, and practical wisdom—the threads I had discerned as integral to the good life—in the fall before my planned defense. Then, I also removed a fully written analytic chapter and a journal article (which was accepted at AERA) from these findings before I landed on these final three chapters, based on my own care for the readers’ endurance and to select only the most crucial findings.

What I learned and claimed. Overall, I learned that to flourish, or to teach, lead, and live well, for the eight teacher-leader participants, they needed to prioritize the purpose of relating with students (as I claimed in Chapter V), seek and cultivate connections with colleagues who share common passions (as I claimed in Chapter VI), and balance the entangled priorities of teaching and leading through practical wisdom and in the midst of the tension between self and others (as I claimed in Chapter VII). Under the surface of these overarching claims, I offer review Table 26.

To explain these claims in detail, I use Table 26 to show that the good life for these eight participants manifested in different ways at different points of their career (i.e., the beginning years, the National Board Years, and recently) in tandem with the three overarching claims. I highlight the career stages on the left side of the table, and then illustrate my claims that passion, purpose, and practical wisdom were mobilized when these eight teachers related to students, connected to colleagues, and learned to lead while balancing their priority (to teach *well*). I also show how these practices evolved over time in each row and manifested for them their own flourishing and good life.

As I display in Table 26, passion, purpose, and practical wisdom were prevalent throughout their careers, but they manifested differently over time.

Table 26

How the Eight Teacher-Leaders Describe and Understand Their Own Flourishing

Career Stage	Relating to Students	Connecting to Colleagues	Leading and Balancing Priorities	
	<i>Passion Purpose Practical Wisdom</i>			
Beginning Years	Building Relationships Through Managing the Classroom (n = 8)	Finding Mentorship: The Power of One (n = 7)	The Classroom Struggle as Baseline for Teaching Well (n = 7)	Balance as Struggle for Sustainability (n = 7)
National Board Years	Educating and Engaging Students Within and Beyond the Classroom (Geographically) (n = 8)	Seeking Support Systems: From Self-Support to Mutual Friendship (n = 6)	Learning the Push and Pull of Leadership as Entangled in Flourishing at the School,	Balance as Saying No (n = 8) <i>And</i>
Recent Years	Cultivating Community with Students Within and Beyond the Classroom (Chronologically) (n = 8)	Mentoring Others (n = 6) and Reflecting on Instigators of Change (n = 5)	District, and State Level of Influence (n = 8)	Seeing Crisis as Opportunity to Grow (n = 3)

In the next sections, I explain the three main conclusions, aligned with the implications and practical recommendations I present that are based on the claims from the three analytic chapters, specifically for the field of education leadership, in policy, research and practice.

**Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations for
Policy, Practice, and Research: Re-Imagining the Good Life**

In this section, I offer a detailed explanation of the three major conclusions, implications, and recommendations that emerged in light of my findings from this study. Importantly, as a guiding premise, the subtitle “Re-Imagining the Good Life” elevates Chris Higgins’s (2011) book about *The Good Life of Teaching* as his work was the impetus for this study and for

wondering about the possibility of *flourishing* as a topic that could contribute to the field of education leadership. Additionally, the subtitle is a reference to Maxine Greene's (2000) work *Releasing the Imagination*, as her book encourages scholars and practitioners of education to reconsider how we frame and think about schools, or in this case, a school's teacher-leaders. For me, this dissertation invited deep reflection on the big question of how teaching may be a way to the good life or to flourish.

Overview of the Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Before I explain the conclusions, implications, and recommendations in detail, I give a zoomed-out overview of the three big conclusions and connected implications in Table 27.

As I show in Table 27, I offer concrete steps based on the findings and these eight participants. Importantly, while these recommendations would at best apply to secondary schools in Wake County, North Carolina, they are still only based on eight teacher-leaders within those schools. Therefore, I offer each conclusion, implication, and recommendation in light of the overarching finding, and my claim, my hunch, and my own lived experience that guided me to this study were perspicacious at best. In other words, I do claim that teachers in these contexts and programs—the *where*—and in network with self-proclaimed like-minded individuals—the *who*—did in fact describe and understand themselves as flourishing—the *what*—at each of the three distinct points in their career.

Next, I explain *why* this is important and *how* policy, practice, and research “might could” value these findings, as we say in the South.

Table 27

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Conclusions	Implications	Recommendations
Passion, purpose, and practical wisdom were abundantly relevant, integrated, and entangled in what it meant for all of the teachers to live well and the baseline for this is for teachers to know that they are teaching <i>well</i> (Chapters V, VI, and VII).	Current measures of teacher-excellence are limited and over-emphasize quality and effectiveness while forgetting about the ethics and values that bring teachers to the classroom such as purpose and passion for student success and their own improvement overtime (i.e., practical wisdom) (n = 8).	<u>Policy: Re-story Excellence</u> Policymakers, nonprofits, think tanks, and legislatures should consider funding and fueling the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Create teacher pipelines that value purpose/commitment 2) Incentivize professional development programs (like National Boards) that encourage holistic reflective practice. 3) Expand measures of excellence from teacher quality and teacher effectiveness to asking teachers about how they mobilize their passion, purpose, and practical wisdom to live, lead, and teach <i>well</i>.
While we know students benefit from long-term relationships with their teachers (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2014; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013; Tichnor-Wagner & Allen, 2016; Wyckoff, 2015), teachers in this study (n = 8) benefited from long-term relationships with students and colleagues (Chapter V and Chapter VI).	Teacher-leaders are frustrated by the focus on “many well-intentioned initiatives” (Chris), and schools do not carve out enough intentional space to help teachers to learn <i>how</i> to cultivate and sustain deep, complex relationships with students and colleagues, which are vital to flourishing (n = 8).	<u>Practice: Re-center Relationships</u> Schools and professional development or practitioner preparation programs should consider the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Carve out spaces for “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) such as the Pillar Practices. 2) Employ a developmental lens to help adults develop the skills and internal capacities it takes to deepen relationships—with students and colleagues 3) Encourage ongoing dialogue and reflection of the ethical relationships with students and colleagues as the heart of teaching.
New teacher-leaders take on too many roles and responsibilities too fast and too soon. Therefore, without time for experience and reflection, some burn-out as they have not learned to manage the “tragic dilemma” (Higgins, 2011, p. 52) or tension between the self and other, inherent in teaching—a highly-demanding helping profession <i>well</i> (n=7 were on the cusp of burn out). (Chapter VII). Instead, the teacher-leaders in this study were teacher-leader surfers and surfed the waves of leadership with discernment.	The multiple teacher roles, styles, and waves in tandem with ongoing discussions of the potential for hierarchical career ladders for teachers need more attention in research to learn about the push and pull of leadership that may infringe upon a teacher’s capacity to teach well as seven of the eight participants mentioned.	<u>Research: Re-Frame Teacher Tides</u> Education Leadership researchers should consider the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) How, if at all, do we develop teacher-leaders who can discern their own tides of leadership? 2) How, if at all, are there other teachers out there who are “unicorns” like Ella and Alice who practice their self-described “irrational” persistence and also flourish? 3) How, if at all, do relationships with students and colleagues influence the waves of leadership teachers choose to keep and sustain in their careers outside of their classrooms? 4) How might flourishing, as I described in this study, offer qualitatively different entry point for exploring teacher-turnover than current research on teach job satisfaction?

To Policy: Re-Storying Excellence of Teaching

In this section, I explain my first conclusion that I believe is most relevant to policymakers. I conclude that passion, purpose, and practical wisdom were abundantly relevant, integrated, and entangled in what it meant for all of the teachers ($n = 8$) to live well, and the baseline for this is for teachers to know that they are teaching *well* (Chapters V, VI, and VII). To be specific, whether they were First-Year Teacher of the Year ($n = 3$), which Ella described as “the best of the worst,” or took on coaching ($n = 4$) and other extracurricular leadership ($n = 2$), the majority ($n = 6$) of the teacher participants in this study expressed that they were leaders and committed to teaching *and leading* from day one. They started their first-year teaching with the knowledge that they had “made a commitment” ($n = 6$) because of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program, and for almost all of them ($n = 6$) doing their National Boards was “just the next step,” as Patricia said. Importantly, it was their “next step,” first, because of the pay raise (mentioned by all eight teachers as the clear reason to pursue it) and, second, because they also wanted to “improve,” as Saul mentioned ($n = 8$) and push into leadership roles for more influence ($n = 6$). Also, they ($n = 6$) explained that they most likely would have stayed in the teaching profession anyway because “quitting isn’t in [my] DNA” as Chris said.

As a result, I believe these teacher-participants’ commitment to their purpose in teaching *and leadership*—from day one in the classroom—showed that they are not only “irreplaceable” (Jacob et al., 2012, p. 2) teachers, but also that their lived experiences re-story the meaning of excellence in the profession. To them, I conclude that excellence in teaching was manifested in their purpose, passion, and practical wisdom over time—not their degrees (i.e., teacher quality) or their students’ test scores (i.e., teacher effectiveness) alone.

Implication that current measures of excellence are limited. In response to this conclusion, a clear implication is how the current measures that policymakers use to describe good teaching, or better, excellence in teaching are not enough. In fact, these limited and static measures inspire the perception that teachers are either good or bad as fixed labels from year to year. Not only is this perception inherently flawed, but also the concepts of high-quality and highly-effective teachers do not capture any of the excellence that the eight teachers in this study conveyed as critical to their flourishing (i.e., passion, purpose, and practical wisdom).

To be clear, by high quality, I mean that a teacher is certified and educated in his or her specific field of teaching (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2017; No Child Left Behind, 2005; Race to the Top Act, 2011). All eight participants in this study were highly qualified. In fact, all but two had their master's degree on top of their National Board Certification, and one of those two were pursuing his degree (Saul) during our interviews.

Additionally, the qualifier of a highly-effective teacher means that a teacher has proven to have a positive impact on student achievement as proven by test scores, and research has shown that National Board Certified teachers are highly effective, especially relative to their peers without certification (Belson & Husted, 2015; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015). All eight teachers in my study, therefore, are more likely to be highly effective as bolstered by the fact that seven of the eight received Teacher of the Year nominations at some point, if not multiple times in their career.

Therefore, while the teachers in my study and I would agree that teacher quality and teacher effectiveness are very important, they also conveyed that excellence in teaching, to them, encapsulates passion, purpose, and practical wisdom ($n = 8$). Therefore, as these teachers are among the best qualified and most effective teachers who have also been committed to the

profession for over 10 years, a clear implication is that the measures for excellence are short-sighted and far from holistic in capturing what excellent teachers think about when they think about teaching *well*.

Recommendations to “re-story” teacher excellence. In thinking about the steps to create, sustain, and measure excellence with a more holistic and strengths-based lens, I offer the following specific recommendations for policymakers to consider:

1. Create targeted pipeline for teachers who value their purpose as leaders.
2. Incentivize development that emphasizes reflection and passion for connections.
3. Study and measure, and reward schools for teacher flourishing and practical wisdom over time rather than teacher job satisfaction.

The end goal of these recommendations would be to re-story excellence in the profession from the ground up and top down simultaneously. By “re-story” (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 202) excellence, I mean that preparation programs/pipelines, professional development in schools, and teacher evaluation practices would support an understanding of a holistic and strengths-based lens of the values teachers carry and serve to students beyond their degrees and performance.

In my view, it would also create an opportunity for more holistic criteria to assess the sustainability of our *best and brightest* teachers who strive for excellence in teaching *well* and living *well*. The first step is to create and fund a sustainable pipeline for purposeful teachers.

- 1. Targeted Pipelines for Purposeful Teachers.** States and districts should create and fund a targeted pipeline to recruit and intentionally support the leadership development of strong potential candidates to the teaching profession, as modeled by programs like the North Carolina Teaching Fellows.

Given statistics, and what I have learned from this study, the NCTF program is an exemplar and first step in re-storying the profession because, as a pipeline program, it emphasizes the purpose and power of teaching as a meaningful career. Unlike the practice of teaching the test—as some pipeline programs might do, such as Teach for America, to show their value and effectiveness with high-poverty students, the NCTF program elevated teaching as a career full of purpose—as described by all eight participants.

While I am not saying that pipeline programs that require long-term commitments have an immediate effect of flourishing for teachers, the data from these eight participants showed me that the 4 years of commitment gave these teacher participants time to deepen their own understanding of their *purpose*, *passion*, and *practical wisdom*. While not all Teaching Fellows stayed beyond the 4-year commitment, Henry, Bastian, and Smith, (2012) found that “70% of NC Teaching Fellows stayed in teaching beyond their four years of service” (p. 90) and 64% staying for 6 years (Public School Forum of North Carolina, 2013). Then, for those who stayed beyond 10 years, like the eight teachers in my study, they were not only highly qualified and highly effective but claimed they taught, led, and lived *well* too.

In summary, a targeted pipeline for committed teachers who are empowered to lead and use their passion and purpose in the classroom beyond 4 years deserves a holistic measure of their own excellence that would help *re-story* the profession of teaching to consider how it is a career that, with discernment, provides opportunities for adults to experience passion, purpose, and practical wisdom or the good life. In essence, I recommend that potential pipelines prime possible teaching candidates who are committed to the profession and discern excellence and the *good life* of teaching in addition to the value of being qualified and effective.

Next, I recommend that teachers receive ongoing support and development during their career that emphasize their reflective practice and passion for connecting with students and colleagues, like the support the eight teachers received in my study (i.e., $n = 7$, application to Boards paid for [\$2,500]; $n = 8$, 12% pay raise for earning Boards).

2. Incentivize development that emphasizes reflection on practice and passion for connections. I recommend that policymakers incentivize ongoing support for teacher excellence that promotes self-reflection, such as the National Board Certification, as an exemplar for my second recommendation for three reasons.

First, the National Board Certification is a development program that *already* encourages teachers to participate in deep reflection on their ability to teach *well* and emphasizes teacher-leaders' ability to be effective educators. Second, research has proven that earning this certification is directly tied to student learning and achievement. Specifically, 87% of teachers who earn their Boards stated that they saw a positive impact on student learning (Petty et al., 2016). Compounding these findings, scholarly literature has also demonstrated that when adults, specifically teachers and school leaders, grow and develop, that student achievement also increases (Donaldson, 2008; Guskey, 2000; Mizell, 2010). Third, and perhaps the reason why the Boards stand out in particular, is because it implicitly helped these participants ($n = 6$) to reflect on their practice and *with* their colleagues; plus, all eight participants saw those connections with colleagues and students during this time as critical to their own flourishing and excellence—not to mention the 12% pay raise increased their quality of life ($n = 8$). Therefore, with all of these incentives already built in, North Carolina's original model to fund their application for the Boards (later disbanded in 2012) and then funding a yearly bonus for earning their Boards until the renewal process 10 years later (still funded) may have contributed to Wake County now

having more Board Certified teachers than any district in the nation, as well as having teachers like the eight in my study who *still* claim they flourish and strive for excellence in their teaching.

Next, I explain my third recommendation, which is that policymakers should explore ways to reward schools and teachers for flourishing rather than continue the debate about teacher job satisfaction in order to re-story the profession and support holistic measures for teacher excellence.

3. Study, measure, and reward schools for teacher flourishing rather than teacher job satisfaction. Policymakers should fund research to find holistic measures of understanding and rewarding schools that value flourishing rather than teacher job satisfaction.

Finally, while teacher job satisfaction has helped educational leaders learn which teachers intend to leave their schools (Boyce & Bowers, 2016), and is highly predictable based on school context, collegiality, and administrative support (Urlick, 2016; Xia et al., 2015), the technical fixes that states, districts, and schools applied have yet to work. As proof, despite our empirical knowledge, we have a coming teaching shortage crisis (Sutcher et al., 2016). Re-storying excellence to include flourishing would orient preparation programs, aspiring teachers, practicing educational leaders, and thoughtful policymakers towards the thinking of what *really* helps teachers to thrive in schools beyond their own high quality, as evaluated by degrees and certificates, and being highly effective, as evaluated by student achievement. Why not consider asking teachers, and giving them space, to reflect on and evaluate their own life? Do they see themselves as living, teaching, and leading well? How can we effectively listen to or witness flourishing in schools? How can we reward schools that attempt to promote their teachers' own flourishing?

In summary, my first conclusion is that passion, purpose, and practical wisdom were critical to these teachers' description of the good life, yet their reflections, their relationships, and their discernment about teaching *well* so they could live *well* did not seem to be of value to the system overall. This implied that the current measures of teacher excellence are limited. While these eight teachers did meet the current criteria since they had good degrees (i.e., highly qualified) and good results on students' test scores (i.e., highly effective), I recommend that their flourishing is the re-storying of teacher excellence and possibility in the profession. In my view, future measures for teacher excellence must be more dynamic, like the lived experiences of these eight teachers' own flourishing.

In the next section, I explain my second conclusion, implications, and recommendations for practitioners based on my findings.

Re-Centering Relationships With a Developmental Lens

In this section, I explain my second conclusion, based on the claim in Chapter V and Chapter VI that teachers benefit from long-term relationships with students and colleagues. By re-center, I mean practitioners should emphasize relationships and the complexity of creating them from a developmental lens. With a developmental lens, relationships can be cultivated through "holding environments" (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) that intentionally support expanding internal capacities to grow, personally, and deepen relationships—with students and colleague (see Chapter II for more information). To be clear, I recommend that a developmental lens be the bridge between the educational philosopher's deep wisdom and knowledge that relationships are the key to education and the educational leadership lens of the capacities it takes to create holding environments for adults and to help their relationships to flourish.

In the next sections, I give detailed descriptions of this conclusion, implications, and recommendations for why teachers need to re-center, or emphasize, relationships and their developmental, or internal, capacities to create “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) in order to connect with and relate *well* with others.

Conclusion that re-centering lasting relationships helps teachers last. I conclude that the vitality of the eight teacher-leaders in this study was in part due to their value of lasting relationships, yet their relationships thrived due to their self-reflection (Brookfield, 2017; Freire, 2000; hooks, 2013) and reflection with others, in what I believe were Pillar Practice-*like* or mirrored aspects of “holding environments” (Drago-Severson, 2013, 2016; Drago-Severson et al., 2015). The goal of their reflecting was almost always connected to their caring about students and colleagues. Unfortunately, as research has shown (McGovern, 2014), when practitioners reflect or attend professional development focused on technical skills (Heifetz, 1994), such as how to use Smart Boards (as referenced by Chris), their influence is negligible on their self and their practice (McGovern, 2014). Meanwhile, philosophy of education, often seen as empirically-light to positivists, offers serious scholarship on why the ethics of relationships are central to education and the good life—which practitioners, in my view, must talk about more in order to last in the profession.

In the next section, I explain the implication that a developmental lens is the bridge between education leadership and philosophy of education.

Implication that a developmental lens bridges philosophy and leadership. A developmental lens, to me, provides an entryway into the heart of values and why teaching exists through ethical relationships. For example, from hooks (1989, 2010, 2013) to Hansen (1994, 2000, 2001, 2007) and all the thoughtful pedagogues in between, educational philosophers have

always explained the necessity of teachers valuing their relationships with students. Palmer (2007) on his website titled *The Center for Courage and Renewal* re-emphasized this fundamental truth as he adapted his first chapter from his book in an article titled “The Heart of a Teacher.” Palmer said:

The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror, and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. (par. 4)

Here, he described how teaching is a practice of “self-knowledge” and “holds a mirror to the soul.” In other words, a teacher’s willingness to “look . . . and not run,” as these eight teacher-leaders did in this study, is critical to their flourishing. Therefore, while philosophy helped me as a researcher to remember the value of relationships, a developmental lens both helped, and continued to help me, see that the teachers in this study might have had the capacity and skills to develop deeper relationships.

In essence, my next recommendation stems from the following questions: What classes, skills, knowledge, or capacities prepare teachers to cultivate these relationships, specifically with students? If “knowing myself” is crucial to “knowing my students,” then how do educational leadership practitioners help teachers reflect meaningfully and intentionally about lasting relationships?

Recommendation for developmental lens of relating with others to schools. In response to this conclusion and implication, I recommend that practitioners learn, understand, and integrate a developmental lens into professional development during a teacher’s career as the bridge to helping aspiring teachers and practicing teacher-leaders re-center the ethics of care in relationships and the necessity of reflection about the self in relation to others.

To do so, I recommend a developmental lens as the bridge between philosophy and leadership, specifically Drago-Severson's extensive work on Pillar Practices (see Chapter II). This is because the Pillar Practices emphasize environments that honor who we really are and provide spaces to reflect with others. According to the eight participants in this study, their flourishing centered on their own capacity to build lasting relationships with students and colleagues. In other words, for educational leaders and teacher preparation programs who aspire to train teacher-leaders who might flourish, I contend that they should consider research on how to create "holding environments" because mentorship and support systems work best with developmental intentionality (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 48; Kegan, 1982, p. 115; Winnicott, 1965) and provide spaces for teachers to reflect on how best to care for themselves and others to live *well*.

In summary, the passion of the eight teacher-leaders in this study guided their flourishing throughout their careers. Therefore, I recommend that practitioners especially should explore how holding environments with a developmental lens and a blend of philosophical ethics of care can help teachers live *well*.

Re-Defining the Tides of Teacher-Leadership

In this section, I explain the conclusions and implications that led me to the recommendation that education leadership researchers should re-define and explore the *tides* of teacher-leadership. By tides, I mean the rhythmic push and pull of teacher-leadership in light of the mounting *wave of leadership* (see Silva et al., 2000, and Holland et al., 2014 for more explanation of this below).

To develop this line of reasoning, I first offer a detailed explanation of the conclusions I have drawn about teacher-leader waves and how I concluded that the teacher-leader participants

in this study were proverbial surfers. Then, I give a detailed explanation of the implications and recommendations for seeing teacher-leadership as *tides* of leadership rather than ladders or lattices.

Conclusion that teachers need more time. I conclude that all of the teacher-leader participants in my research saw flourishing as entangled in the push and pull of leadership and within their balancing of priorities (Chapter VII). Also, based on the rise of teacher turnover and fewer and fewer experienced teachers in the profession (Sutcher et al., 2016), I believe there is a gap in current teacher-leaders' understanding of the "tragic dilemma" (Higgins, 2011, p. 52) or the tension inherent in teacher-leadership between the demands of the self and the demands of others. As a result, I believe that teachers have forgotten that the value of practical wisdom cultivated *over time* and through *experience* is crucial to the good life, especially the good life of teaching. Instead, new teachers take on too many roles too quickly and get caught up in the teacher-leader waves, which I describe briefly next.

Teacher-leader waves. Researchers already know much about teacher-leadership. For example, almost two decades ago, Silva et al. (2000) discussed the "waves" (p. 779) of leadership evolving over time from managerial to instructional, and the third wave of process-oriented organizational leadership within and beyond the school. Based on the lives of three teachers, Silva et al. explained how "teacher-leaders 'slide the doors open'" (p. 781) in order to influence others and promote changes beyond their classroom within this third wave, which they believed was just emerging in the early 2000s. More than a decade later, Holland et al. (2014) added a fourth wave which they called a "teacherpreneur and demonstrated how teachers can be involved in issues of equity, quality, and innovation in small and large ways (Berry, Byrd, & Wieder, 2013)" (p. 438). To these researchers and others, teacher-leaders must first prove to be

excellent teachers for their students (Crowther, 1997; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015b; Lowery-Moore et al., 2016; York-Barr & Duke, 2004), and it is from their classroom that their leadership takes on new “waves” (Silva et al., 2000, p. 779).

While these teacher-leader waves are helpful descriptors, I conclude that the eight teacher participants in this study stayed in the profession long enough to discern how to ride the waves rather than let mounting tsunami of responsibility overwhelm them.

Teacher-leaders as surfers. If teacher-leadership exists in waves, then the eight teacher-leaders in this study were extreme, and extremely talented, surfers. Of the eight teachers in my study, five existed in all three of Silva et al.’s (2000) *waves* (i.e., managerial, instructional, and policy-oriented) by maintaining department leadership, which is the first wave, through mentoring, writing curriculum, or leading district trainings—at the same time. Importantly, the other three teacher-leaders (Saul, Chris, and Ella) were involved in district- and state-wide reform efforts, thus qualifying to ride all three waves plus the fourth and *newer* wave of *teacherpreneurship*, according to Holland et al. (2014). Interestingly, the participants in my study who led within all three “waves” (Silva et al., 2000, p. 779) suggested that most recently in their careers, they needed to stop, as per Silva et al.’s (2000) second metaphor, sliding the proverbial doors of leadership closes (see title of article “Sliding the Doors: Locking and Unlocking the Possibilities for Teacher Leadership). In other words, they explained that they needed to say “no,” shut some doors, and let some of the waves roll away in order to teach *well* in their classroom once again.

Example of the push of the tide. From the teacher participants, I learned that they had incredible momentum their first years. They already saw themselves as leaders (due to the NCTF, n = 8), so they experienced a reciprocity in their efforts. They pushed for leadership and

leadership roles pulled them, too. Their lived experience showed me this because all eight teacher-leaders embarked upon the National Board Certification process as soon as they were eligible to continue to cultivate their own leadership. The most veteran teachers in this study, for example, were among the first to do their Boards in the entire nation since they completed them the first year it was available ($n = 2$), and all the other teachers completed their Boards by their fifth year of teaching ($n = 6$), even those who did not pass the first time ($n = 3$).

Their momentum did not stop with earning their Boards but, as I showed in Chapter VII, it led to more leadership. All eight teachers were leading, teaching, and saying “yes” and pushing (or being pushed) to be the School Improvement Chair (Ella and Chris), the department chair (Danielle and Leigh), or a leader of professional development for their school and, specifically, for new teachers (Patricia, Alice, Ella, and Saul). For them, and for a time, riding all three waves of leadership was how they all lived *well* or, in their own words, flourished within the first decade of their teaching.

Example of the tide pulling back. By contrast, as the personal priorities and life rhythm of these teachers shifted to wanting to buy a house, get married, and have kids, they realized they had to start saying “no” and take extra leadership roles off their plate. For example, Molly decided to be a “buddy” instead of an “official mentor” and refused administration when they begged her to lead graduation; meanwhile, Alice stopped leading the yearbook staff after over 15 years; Leigh gave up National Honor Society when she and her husband decided to try to get pregnant. Interestingly, I was also respectfully told “no” by two possible participants because they were pregnant with their first children. For the teachers in this study, these choices were not easy or even their honest preference. Instead, I claim that all eight participants viewed pulling back from leadership and saying “no” as necessary to maintain their balance, to keep surfing the

most important wave of teaching *well*. I claimed, in Chapter VII, that teaching *well* was their most important priority—or to continue the metaphor, their center of gravity and discernment for the next worthy wave. For them to continue to be teacher-leaders, their practical wisdom and cultivated discernment through practice (hooks, 2010; Hustedde, 2015; MacIntyre, 2007) helped them learn when to let some of the waves go.

Returning to the imagery of the tide, conceptually, this shift or pushing away of leadership opportunities was like the tide returning towards the horizon as the teacher-leaders' personal and family lives pulled them back to the proverbial space of balance. In other words, to varying degrees, they stopped riding the waves of leadership with the intention of re-focusing on their classroom ($n = 6$). To clarify what I mean when I said that this choice was not their preferred choice, I mean that the majority ($n = 7$) of the participants stated they “knew” they had to say “no” to teacher-leadership opportunities in order to keep flourishing and not “burn out” (Chris). This resonated with the Huberman Paradox, which suggests so many established veteran teachers do burn out after they lead beyond their classroom because of layering struggles (Huberman, 1989; Little & Bartlett, 2002). Thus, I believe a conclusion is that there is a need to move away from the layering-the-waves metaphors of teacher-leadership.

Tides as personal discernment and choice. Importantly, too, this shift in tide did not occur for these eight teachers all at the same time, but at varying points in their careers. As I showed in Chapter VII, these changes happened incrementally for all eight of the teachers, as they evinced their own practical wisdom, and even responded to crises for Saul and Alice. As I said in Chapter VII, Ella—the Ethical Edutainer/Activist was one teacher who was still riding not only all three waves, but also the fourth wave as she added policy work to her plate in 2013. As she stated in her documentary, “The problem is it never stops . . . I never close the door. I

never turn out the lights.” For Ella, she “never” or has yet to close Silva et al.’s (2000) proverbial sliding door to leadership. Therefore, it is important to note that not all teacher-leaders live by the same rhythms.

Additionally, as Ella’s lived experience conveyed, the tides may come back, and teachers may decide to ride bigger waves of leadership after saying “no” for a while. For Ella, the fourth wave of leadership came back even stronger for her after 20 years of experience when she decided to start a nonprofit to promote public education. While she believed she still flourished because she “evolved” in her career and maintained “influence” with her students, both new and old, she admitted that the amount of work and dedication she put into her teaching and leading was “not rational.” As she previously called herself a “unicorn” for being a teacher in policy, Ella’s account was proof that her reason for doing this was not incentives because none exist that are good enough for teacher-leaders to surf all four waves all the time—unless they are completely irrational.

In summary, based on the lived experiences of these eight teachers, the waves, rhythms, and tides of leadership for each teacher varied, but they saw their best waves and surfed them well due to their own investment in their discernment and wisdom of their main goal—not to be surfers of teacher-leadership tides, but to teach *well* so they could surf when the time was right—for them.

In the next section, I explain the implications and recommendations based on the conclusions about all the waves and these teacher-leader surfers.

Implication that without time and practical wisdom, waves of leadership turn into a tsunami. The conclusions that teacher waves are ever-increasing and teacher-leaders must learn how to surf between them led me to the implication that practical wisdom is the key to helping

teacher-leaders stay on top of teaching, leading, and living well rather than drown in a tsunami-sized level of leadership and responsibility. In other words, I believe the data from these eight participants showed me that they flourished by not only managing the complex and competing demands of teaching and leading (Drago-Severson, 2016), but also letting go and saying no to opportunities when they discerned the time was right for them.

To do so, these eight teacher-leaders aligned their leadership commitments with their values, their priorities, and their own rhythms of life. This decision making and “self-ful” (Higgins, 2011, p. 2) leadership showed how they cultivated their practical wisdom and consciousness. In other words, using the ocean for imagery again, as the tide of the ocean responds to the natural and rhythmic push and pull of the moon, these teachers discerned the tides and read which waves they could and could not surf. Is this decision making an ability? Is this capacity developmental? Is this the result of organizational functioning? Is it just idiosyncratic? Is it experience and reflective practice? Trial and error?

To learn more, I recommend that education leadership researchers explore tides of leadership as this new metaphor may help them develop new questions around teacher-leadership—not based on style, context, and roles, but instead on teacher discernment and in relation to the good life of teaching, leading *and* living well.

Next, I recommend a serious consideration to re-frame teacher-leadership in terms of the metaphor of tides. Then, I offer a few examples of potential research questions as recommendations for future research.

Recommendation to re-frame the tides of teacher-leadership. I recommend that researchers explore re-framing teacher-leadership in light of the imagery of the tide. A tide elicits the natural rhythm of push and pull, which I recommend is a better metaphor based on my claims

and learnings from the teacher-leader participants in this study. Therefore, here I break down this lofty recommendation by summarizing the conclusions of what we know and suggesting concrete next steps in research.

What we do next. To know what to do next, we need more information. As a brief review, we know the following:

1. Teacher-leadership exists in four simultaneously occurring waves and is an irrational expectation of teachers to sustain (Berry et al., 2013; Berry & Shields, 2017; Holland et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2000).
2. Teachers are in fact burning out and turning over (Sutcher et al., 2016) due to exponentially increasing demands (Drago-Severson, 2016) and lack of supportive conditions and leadership (Atteberry et al., 2016; Ingersoll et al., 2014; Xia et al., 2015).
3. Practical wisdom was one, but not the only, thread that helped the eight teacher-leaders in this study read the tides of leadership, as surfers, and their life in order to say “no” and prevent their own burnout.

As a result, we need more research in educational leadership to explore how both teacher-leaders and principals make sense of the *tides* of leadership in concert with the rhythms of their life’s priorities. Therefore, to learn more, I recommend that researchers explore the following questions:

1. How, if at all, do we develop teacher-leaders who can discern their own tides of leadership?
2. How, if at all, are there other teachers out there who are “unicorns” like Ella and Alice, who practice their self-described “irrational” persistence and also flourish?

3. How, if at all, do relationships with students and colleagues influence the waves of leadership teachers choose to keep and sustain in their careers outside of their classrooms?
4. How might flourishing, as I described in this study, offer qualitatively different entry points for exploring teacher-turnover than current research on teacher job satisfaction?

Answers to these questions may offer further insights for aspiring teacher-leaders and practicing principals who want to retain “unicorn” teachers, like Ella, by offering new understandings of how and when it is beneficial to the teachers’ lives for them to lead or take on a wave of leadership.

In summary, in light of the abundance of teacher turnover, which is limiting the cultivation of teacher-leaders, I recommend we need more research in the field of education leadership to integrate understandings of life cycles, career points, career ladders, and the like. I offer that these research lines need to happen in conjunction with the push of the Wake County Public School System and other school systems that are benefit or bonus structures attached to these career ladders, given that the tides of life’s needs are often irrevocably attached to financial commitments and needs. Also, while formal organizational structures are helpful to monetizing rewards and securing power for teacher-leaders, all eight teacher-leaders in this study, who described themselves as flourishing, explained that their students were most important to them. How can educational leaders help teacher-leaders surf all the waves of leadership, read the tides of life, and flourish?

In the next and final section before the chapter summary, I review an important theoretical application of this research, which is an emerging framework of teacher-leader flourishing based on the lived experience of these eight teacher-leader participants.

Every End Is a New Beginning: An Emerging Framework of Teacher-Leader Flourishing

In this section, I explain Figure 2, which is an emerging theoretical framework and model for future application of the findings. In the figure, I summarize the conclusions of how these eight teacher-leaders flourished in light of the three threads of passion, purpose, and practical wisdom and the findings about relating to students (Chapter V), connecting with colleagues (Chapter VI), and leadership entanglements (Chapter VII). In Figure 2, I use a pyramid structure to show that the thread at the foundation (i.e., passion in the beginning years) was the most visible and vital thread to flourishing during that distinct period. Next, the descriptive summary below explains how each thread was mobilized for all eight teachers in this study during that time of the career. The aim of this figure is to offer a tentative and emerging theoretical way of *seeing* how teacher-leaders might flourish at distinct points in their career, a visual summary of this dissertation.

Again, as I show in Figure 2, the presence of practical wisdom, I believe, grew increasingly necessary and mobilized more apparently for the teachers in my study, who flourished later in their careers just as their focus and need for passion as a foundational aspect of how and why they teach *well* became less mobilized over time, though still present.

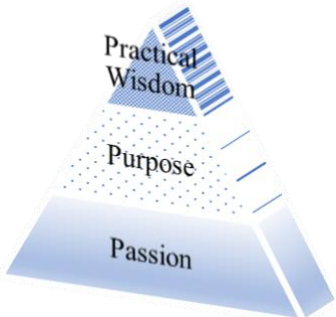

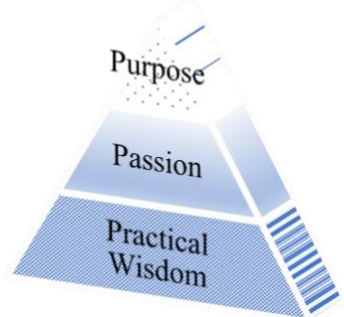
Beginning Years 0-3 (up to 5) years of experience	National Board Years 5-15 years of experience	“Recently” 15-25 Years of Experience
 <p>Flourishing teacher-leaders, according to this study, have a foundation of <u>passion</u> for building relationships with students <i>with mentors whose purpose is to help them solve classroom management problems in order to grow in their classroom-level practical wisdom.</i></p>	 <p>Flourishing teacher-leaders, according to this study, at this career stage find meaning and <u>purpose</u> in educating and engaging students along <i>with colleagues who share their passion and focus.</i> They are growing in their practical wisdom through solving school-wide problems and becoming school leaders.</p>	 <p><u>Practical wisdom</u> was the foundation of flourishing for teacher-leaders, according to this study, at this career stage, built from years of leading and introspective understanding of personal balance. Their passion and purpose are sustained by <i>long-lasting community of relationships with students and colleagues.</i></p>

Figure 2. A tentative framework of flourishing for teacher-leaders over time
(A Theory for Teacher-Leader Flourishing)

I believe this model could be used, judged, validated, contradicted, or altered as other researchers, too, find this a starting place for using a strengths-based lens on how and why teachers do good work, if and when they do at all? My recommendation is that researchers do explore other ways to either operationalize or theorize what the good life of teaching might look like in different contexts, with different people and in different times, as so much has changed even since 2011 when Higgins published his work that inspired mine.

Chapter Summary and Reflections

In conclusion, in this final chapter, I reviewed the participants and findings for my dissertation study with eight teacher-leaders in Wake County Public Schools in North Carolina. Then, I offered three overarching implications of re-storying excellence, re-centering relationships, and re-defining the tides of teacher leadership. It is important to understand that these implications are conceptually applicable to practice, policy, and research to a grander degree than my findings permit.

Finally, I was profoundly influenced by each of the eight participants in this study as they are living inspirations. Not only was I tempted to return to their district to teach again in the fall after I interviewed them, but I also found myself experiencing more passion, purpose, and practical wisdom as I have lived with their words for almost an entire year. I realized that I was once with them, and the sadness struck me as I realized that I would still be with them if I had not pursued my doctorate. Somehow, I fell in a different leadership current. (Maybe I took the metaphor too far?) It is my deepest hope that this current still finds its way to supporting teachers like Ella, Alice, Saul, Molly, Patricia, Leigh, Danielle, and Chris.

During the member checks and in hearing about their most recent years of teaching, I was delighted to hear continued good news of changes and developments in each of their lives, personally and professionally. I was fundamentally humbled by their trust, their openness, and their honesty about their struggles and their triumphs. As Ella reflected upon the relationships with her students:

Because it's about being in a relationship with them. If I've somehow proven myself worthy of being in a relationship with them, then that's a great, awesome outcome.

I feel the same about the relationship with the teachers in this study. They are the professionals whose voice, whose work, and whose lives inspire flourishing and excellence in

others—or at least in me. I am honored and indebted to each of them for their time, sacrifice, and vulnerability. At the end of this research, I am convinced that teaching *is* the good life.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol #1

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Start Time of Interview: _____ End time of Interview: _____

Introduction to Interview: Context	(5-10 minutes)
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1. **Appreciation & Introduction**

Thank you very much for making time to share your insights and experiences. I am very grateful that you are willing to talk with me about your experiences as a teacher leader. Also, thank you for signing and returning the consent form. I just want to confirm once more—is it still okay with you for me to audio-record our interview? Just to confirm and out of respect for honoring your time I have planned approximately 60-90 minutes for this interview. Is that your understanding too? Do you have any questions about the consent form or anything else at this time? [If yes, I will answer the question. If no, then I will say: “OK, great. Then, let’s get started—I want to make the most of your time.”]

2. **Overview of Our Purpose and Goals**

As a gentle reminder, I invited you to participate in this research study called “Re-Storying a Profession to Flourish: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study with North Carolina Teacher-Leaders.” You qualified to take part in this research study because you are over 18 years old, taught for a minimum of 10 years, are an NC Teaching Fellow, and earned National Board Certification. Approximately 8-12 people will participate in this study; it will take 3- 4.5 hours of your time to complete. Today, we begin with the first interview that should last 60-90 minutes, but feel free to stop at any time for any reason.

I am doing this study to learn more about *your* perspective regarding how you, as a practicing teacher-leader, describe and understand your own flourishing in your career, if you do at all, and the supports and challenges you may have experienced that helped and/or hindered your flourishing, if you do at all. For this study, I think of flourishing as experiences that involve purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and play/joy, and I am eager to learn your personal description and understanding of your own flourishing, if you do at all. There are no right or wrong answers; rather I will be talking with you to better understand *your personal experience*. Thank you *so very much*, in advance, for your help and time.

3. **Confidentiality**

In any publications, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality. I may quote things that you say but I will never use your name unless I have your permission. I’d also like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question that you prefer not to answer.

4. **Questions**

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have questions at any time, please let me know

Interview Guide

Interview # 1: Introduction and Background

So, let's get begin.

Section 1: Personal Background (30-45 minutes) Becoming an NC Teaching Fellow and a NC Public School Teacher

1. I'd like to start by asking about your background. Can you tell me about what inspired you to become a teacher?

Probes: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

- 1.1 Any experiences growing up? (in general, with friends, with family?)
- 1.2 Any experiences in K-12? Important teachers? College? Important professors?
- 1.3 When do you first remember being interested in teaching?
- 1.4 Why did you want to teach? What did you think it would be like?

2. Can you tell me about how you made the decision to become a teacher? What was that like for you?

Probes: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

- 2.1. Any influences that helped you make that decision?
- 2.2. How did you become an NC Teaching Fellow?
- 2.3. Did you consider any other career path? Why or Why not? And if so, what were they?
How did you decide upon teaching?
- 2.4. What were your expectations of teaching? What did you think it would be like for you?

3. What was it like being an NC Teaching Fellow in college? Can you tell me about that experience?

Probes: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

- 3.1. Where did you do your undergraduate work?
- 3.2. What was your major?
- 3.3. What conferences, professional development, classes, or other experiences related to the program do you remember, if any?
- 3.4. Can you tell me about a time that illustrates one or two of your most memorable experiences? (i.e. Discovery Bus Tour, Diversity Conference, Excursions, visits to districts, etc.)
- 3.5. What themes or foci did they emphasize about being a teacher? (i.e. diversity, leadership, inclusion, assessment, evaluation, etc.)

3.6. Where and when did you do your student teaching? What was that like?

3.6.1. What was the school context like? (demographics, cooperating teacher, class schedule, expectations, etc.)

4. What did you do after graduating from college? Can you walk me through your path?

Probes: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

4.1. Did you earn a **master's degree or teaching certificate another way**? What was that like for you??

4.2. What was applying for jobs like? What was the market like?

4.3. How did you decide which school system to apply for?

4.4. What were the job interviews like? If you had any?

5. At this, your first teaching job, what did you think you would need to feel purpose/meaning?

Section 2: School Context and First Three Years of teaching (30-45 minutes)
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I am going to transition now into asking you about your specific experience your first three years of teaching. To do so, I'd love to learn a little bit more about the school where you are now, and any other schools where you taught.

6. So, first, can you tell me about the school context where you taught your first three years? (If not at the same school, ask for clarifications and reasons for leaving.)

Probes: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

6.1. Student demographics such as school SES, race/ethnicity

6.2. Teacher demographics such as age, race, years of experience

6.3. Type of school—public or charter, grade levels, size of school, number of students, faculty, and staff?

6.4. How did you decide upon this school?

7. What do you think is important to know about _____(name of school)?

Probes: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

7.1. What is the school culture?

7.2. What is the mission?

7.3. What are the values?

7.4. What did you think was particularly special about the school for you?

8. Tell me more about the greater context surrounding your school? What is important to know about _____ (name of city/town)?

Probe: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

- 8.1. How is the school population relative to the surrounding population?
- 8.2. If “urban” or “rural” or “suburban” what does that mean?
- 8.3. What types of jobs do students and parents hold?
- 8.4. What are the politics of the community or central issues, if any?

Now, we are going to transition to learning about your actual experience.

- 9. I would love to dive into your first teaching experiences, or the beginning years (1-3). What was that experience like for you?
- 10. Here’s a piece of paper with a circle on it. If you were to divide that circle – that pie – into pieces so that the sections show how you spent your time (life/work) during your first three (3) years as a teacher, what would it look like?

Probes:

- 10.1. Go through each “slice” and ask them to describe what it is and what it *means*.
- 10.2. Specifically, ask for activities, people involved, etc.
- 11. Many beginning teachers speak of their work as a struggle. Would you say that your beginning (1-3) years included much of a sense of struggle? How would you describe it?

Probes:

- 11.1. Can you think of a moment during that phase when you felt like you were really struggling professionally?
- 11.2. How did that feel?
- 11.3. How did you respond? Is that a typical response?
- 11.4. Can you describe what was going on and what you were doing?
- 11.5. Did you do anything to try to change things? If so, what?
- 11.6. How, in hindsight, do you think you endured the struggle?
 - 11.6.1. Did you consider leaving? If so, why?
 - 11.6.1.1. If not, why not?
- 11.7. How did it influence your feelings about teaching, if it did at all?
- 11.8. How did it influence your feelings about yourself, if it did at all?
- 12. We all hope that things will go well for us in our work – that we’ll always get good feedback from our principal, that our student evaluations will be good, that our colleagues will be helpful to us. But often things don’t go entirely well. We encounter challenges – for example, a surprise new test or curriculum, interpersonal conflict with another teacher, or not being able to reach a certain student. Can you think of a moment when *you* encountered one or more such challenges in your work during your beginning, or first three, years? Can you describe this experience for me?

Probes:

- 12.1. How did you respond to that challenge?
- 12.2. Was the way you responded in that situation indicative of how you tended to

- respond to tough situations? How or how not?
- 12.3. How did you endure and/or overcome it, if you did?
- 12.4. How did this challenge make you feel about the profession and yourself as a part of it?
- 12.5. Did you consider leaving, if so, why?
 - 12.5.1. If not, why not?
- 13. Can you tell me about a time while in your first three years felt particularly engaged, joyful or excited? These are ways I have described the concept of flourishing, but I am curious about the experience in your own words and your own story.

Probes:

- 13.1. Can you describe what was going on, what you were doing?
- 13.2. How did you feel at that moment?
 - 13.2.1. What emotions, if any, did you experience?
 - 13.2.2. What, if anything, gave you a sense of well-being?
 - 13.2.3. What sense of hope, if any, did you experience?
 - 13.2.4. Did you ever feel like teaching might be a calling or a vocation for you? Can you explain why or why not?
 - 13.2.5. Probe words: compassion, self-care, positivity, vulnerability, joy, engagement, and social justice/critical pedagogy.
- 13.3. I use words like *joy*, *excited*, and *engaged* to describe threads of flourishing. You used (fill in word from participant), can you tell me more what you mean by that?
- 14. Can you describe what you found most helpful about that experience? (i.e., people, life events, school structures, relationships, communities, activities, students, etc.

Probes:

- 14.1. How would you describe the supports that helped you feel (insert their words) way?
- 14.2. How, if at all, do you think these supports may have hindered your experiencing these things?
- 14.3. How would you describe any challenges that also may have helped?
- 14.4. . . . or hindered these feelings?

Section 3: Closing (5-10 minutes)
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- 1. And, anything you feel you wanted to share more about that I didn't give you a chance to explain or clarify?
- 2. Is there anything else you want to tell me about any of the questions I've asked?
- 3. Do you have any questions for me?
- 4. If I have any further questions, would you be willing to talk with between now and the 2nd interview?

5. I would like to send you a copy of the transcript of this interview for you to review for accuracy. Will that be OK?

_____ YES

_____ NO

Finally, thank you so much for your time. I know you have an extremely busy schedule, and I appreciate your carving out some time, and I look forward to our second interview in a few weeks.

Document Review Request

Before our second interview, I would like to have an opportunity to learn more about your experiences becoming a teacher leader and to do so, I would love to get a sense of that experience by reading anything you think might help. My first request, only if you feel comfortable, would be to see the submissions to NBCT. If you still have them, could you send them to me this week?

_____ YES

_____ NO

Please confirm which email address you'd like me to use for sending your transcript and communications about this work.

Best Email: _____

Thank you so very much!

Appendix B

Interview Protocol #2

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Start Time of Interview: _____ End time of Interview: _____

Introduction to Interview: Context	(5-10 minutes)
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1. Appreciation & Introduction

Thank you very much for making time to share your insights and experiences. I am very grateful that you are willing to talk with me about your experiences as a teacher-leader, again. Also, thank you for signing and returning the consent form before our first interview. I just want to confirm once more—is it still okay with you for me to audio-record our interview? Just to confirm and out of respect for honoring your time I have planned approximately 60-90 minutes for this interview. Is that your understanding too? Do you have any questions about the consent form or anything else at this time? [If yes, I will answer the question. If no, then I will say: “OK, great. Then, let’s get started—I want to make the most of your time.”]

2. Overview of Our Purpose and Goals

As a gentle reminder, I invited you to participate in this research study called “Re-Storying a Profession to Flourish: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study with North Carolina Teacher-Leaders.” Today, we will begin with the second interview that should last 60-90 minutes, but feel free to stop at any time for any reason.

I am doing this study to learn more about *your* perspective regarding how you, as a practicing teacher-leader, describe and understand your own flourishing in your career, if you do at all, and the supports and challenges you may have experienced that helped and/or hindered your flourishing, if you do at all. For this study, I think of flourishing as experiences that involve purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and play/joy, and I am eager to learn your personal description and understanding of your own flourishing, if you do at all. There are no right or wrong answers; rather I will be talking with you to better understand *your personal experience*. Thank you *so very much*, in advance, for your help and time.

3. Confidentiality

In any publications, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality. I may quote things that you say but I will never use your name unless I have your permission. I’d also like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question that you prefer not to answer.

4. Questions

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have questions at any time, please let me know

5. Review

For a quick refresher, last time I learned about your journey to becoming a teacher and a bit about your first/current school. We delved into your first three years teaching as well and how, if at all, you are/were flourishing during that time. Now, I am excited to learn more about your personal experiences at this school (or insert name of school participant as you earned your National Board Certification and in the most recent school year. Thank you so much for sending (list documents). They were extremely insightful!

So, let's begin interview #2.

Section 1: Teacher Leader Experience through NBCT (30-45)

Today, I am excited to learn about your experiences leading up to and during your National Board Certification.

1. Sometimes teachers draw support and information from communities within and beyond their own school. From which communities, if any, within or beyond your school, have you drawn support or information that has been helpful to you, as you have made decisions about your career?

Probes:

- 1.1. Can you describe whether they were professional, personal or online communities?
 - 1.2. What sort of supports did they offer?
 - 1.3. Can you tell me a story about a time one of those communities were especially helpful?
2. Can you tell me about your experience leading up to the decision to earn your National Board Certification?

Probes:

- 2.2. What was your level of experience as a teacher?
- 2.3. How did you find out about it?
- 2.4. What factors did you consider?
- 2.5. What influences, if any, did you have?
- 2.6. How, if at all, did you already consider yourself a leader at the school before? What did that mean to you?

3. What was your experience earning your National Board Certification like for you?

Probes:

- 3.1 Did you get any formal or informal orientation or training?
- 3.2 Was it specifically targeted at helping you with the NBCT process?
 - 3.2.1 What format did it take?
 - 3.2.1.1 Who was responsible for it? (Department, Institution, Professional Organization?)
- 3.3 If you were going to organize a development session for pre-NBCT teachers, what would have made it better for you? Why so?

4. Many teachers speak of the NBCT process as a struggle as many do not pass their first time. Would you say that your experience included much of a sense of struggle? How would you describe it?

Probes:

- 4.1. Can you think of a moment during that phase when you felt like you were really struggling professionally?
- 4.2. How did that feel?
- 4.3. How did you respond? Is that a typical response?
- 4.4. Can you describe what was going on and what you were doing?
- 4.5. Did you do anything to try to change things? If so, what?
- 4.6. How, in hindsight, do you think you endured the struggle?
 - 4.6.1. Did you consider quitting? If so, why?
 - 4.6.2. If not, why not?
- 4.7. How did it influence your feelings about teaching or yourself as a teacher, if it did at all?

5. What, for you, if anything, was challenging about that experience?

Probes:

- 4.1. Were life events, culture, community, teaching, or students a part of this experience?
 - 4.2. Can you think of a moment during that phase when you felt like you were really struggling professionally?
 - 4.3. Can you describe what was going on and what you were doing?
 - 4.4. How did you feel at that moment?
 - 14.5. How did you endure and/or overcome it, if you did?
 - 14.6. How did this challenge make you feel about the profession and yourself as a part of it?
 - 4.5. During that time, did you have any support? If so, what did that look like?
 - 4.6. Did you do anything to try to change things? What?
6. Can you tell me about a time while earning your National Boards you felt particularly engaged, joyful or excited? These are ways I have described the concept of flourishing, but I am curious about the experience in your own words and your own story.

Probes:

- 6.1. Can you describe what was going on?
- 6.2. What you were doing?
- 6.3. How did you feel at that moment?
- 6.4. What emotions, if any, did you experience?
- 6.5. What, if anything, gave you a sense of well-being?
- 6.6. What sense of hope, if any, did you experience?
- 6.7. Did you ever feel like teaching might be a calling or a vocation for you? Can you explain why or why not?
- 6.8. Probe words: compassion, self-care, positivity, vulnerability, joy, engagement, and social

justice/critical pedagogy.

6.9. use words like *joy*, *excited*, and *engaged* to describe threads of flourishing. You used (fill in word from participant), can you tell me more what you mean by that?

7. Can you describe what you found most helpful during that experience? (i.e., people, life events, school structures, relationships, communities, activities, students, etc.

Probes:

7.1. How would you describe the supports that helped you feel (insert their words) way?

7.2. How, if at all, do you think these supports may have hindered your experiencing these things?

7.3. How would you describe any challenges that also may have helped?

7.4. . . . or hindered these feelings?

8. Any other memories and reflections during that time that stand out to you?

9. How did you feel when you found out you had become an NBCT?

Probes:

9.1. What was this like for you?

9.2. How did you respond?

9.3. How did it make you feel as a teacher?

9.4. How did it make you feel as a person?

10. After becoming a NBCT, can you elaborate on what it is like being a teacher here at your school, now?

Probes:

10.1. If the person mentions leadership: can you give me a specific example of how you feel you've acted as a teacher leader at this school?

10.2. If the person doesn't mention it, ask about leadership opportunities (formal? Informal?)

11. How, if at all, is your work different as a teacher-leader than other teachers?

Section 4: Recent Experience and Reflections (30-45)

Thank you for telling me about your experiences. I would now like to learn more about how you experience your teaching career **now**.

1. Many teachers within this last academic year (2016-2017) have described their work as a struggle. Would you say that your beginning (1-3) years included much of a sense of struggle? How would you describe it?

Probes:

- 1.1. Can you think of a moment during that phase when you felt like you were really struggling professionally?
- 1.2. How did that feel?
- 1.3. How did you respond? Is that a typical response?
- 1.4. Can you describe what was going on and what you were doing?
- 1.5. Did you do anything to try to change things? If so, what?
- 1.6. How, in hindsight, do you think you endured the struggle?
 - 1.6.1. Did you consider leaving? If so, why?
 - 1.6.1.1. If not, why not?
- 1.7. How did it influence your feelings about teaching or yourself as a teacher, if it did at all?
2. We all hope that things will go well for us in our work – that we'll always get good feedback from our principal, that our student evaluations will be good, that our colleagues will be helpful to us. But often things don't go entirely well. We encounter challenges – for example, a surprise new test or curriculum, interpersonal conflict with another teacher, or not being able to reach a certain student. Can you think of a moment when *you* encountered one or more such challenges in your work during this last academic year? Can you describe this experience for me?

Probes:

- 2.1. How did you respond to that challenge?
- 2.2. Was the way you responded in that situation indicative of how you tended to respond to tough situations? How or how not?
- 2.3. How did you endure and/or overcome it, if you did?
- 2.4. How did this challenge make you feel about the profession and yourself as a part of it?
- 2.5. Did you consider leaving, if so, why?
 - 2.5.1. If not, why not?
3. Can you tell me about a time in this last academic year when you felt particularly engaged, joyful or excited? These are ways I have described the concept of flourishing, but I am curious about the experience in your own words and your own story.

Probes:

- 3.1. Can you describe what was going on, what you were doing?
- 3.2. How did you feel at that moment?
 - 3.2.1. What emotions, if any, did you experience?
 - 3.2.2. What, if anything, gave you a sense of well-being?
 - 3.2.3. What sense of hope, if any, did you experience?
 - 3.2.4. Did you ever feel like teaching might be a calling or a vocation for you? Can you explain why or why not?
 - 3.2.5. Probe words: compassion, self-care, positivity, vulnerability, joy, engagement, and social justice/critical pedagogy.
- 3.3. I use words like *joy*, *excited*, and *engaged* to describe threads of flourishing. You used (fill in word from participant), can you tell me more what you mean by that?

4. Can you describe what you found most supportive about that experience? (i.e., people, life events, school structures, relationships, communities, activities, students, etc.

Probes:

- 4.1. How, if at all, did these supports help you feel (insert their words) way?
 - 4.2. How, if at all, do you think these supports may have hindered your experiencing these things?
 - 4.3. Were there any challenges that also may have helped or hindered these feelings?
5. What do you dream of in terms of your career?

Probe:

- 5.1. What ultimate thing (or things) would you like to achieve?
 - 5.2. How do you envision yourself at the end of your career?
 - 5.3. How would you like to be remembered by your colleagues and your students?
 - 5.4. Have these dreams or images changed much since you began your career?
 - 5.5. What about since you received NBCT?
6. I'm going to ask you to go back to the pie chart that you drew for me earlier one last time. At this time, what, if anything, would you change so that it reflected your ideal life?

Probe:

- 6.1..Why did you make that change? (Probe for each change.)

Section 3: Closing (10-20 minutes)

1. And, my last question if you feel comfortable sharing, is what did you learn about yourself as a beginning teacher, through the NBCT process, and in your recent role? (10 minutes)

Probes:

- 1.1.As a person?
 - 1.2.Anything else?
2. Is there anything else you want to tell me about any of the questions I've asked?
 3. Do you have any questions for me?
 4. If I have any further questions, would you be willing to talk with me?
 5. I would like to send you a copy of the transcript of this interview for you to review for accuracy. Will that be OK?

YES

NO

Member Check Clarification

As I mentioned, later in this process, I will be in touch to share a transcript of the first and second interviews, so that you can adjust anything you see fit. As a reminder, the transcripts you will receive will have pseudonyms in place and any other identifying information removed. I'm hoping you'd be willing to read it and let me know how, if at all, I should adjust or change it so that it is an accurate representation of your experience and reflection on your experience. My hope is we can take some time before our third interview if there are any questions you would like to discuss. Is that okay?

Finally, thank you so much for your time. I know you have an extremely busy schedule, and I appreciate your carving out some time, and I look forward to our third interview in a few weeks.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol #3

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Start Time of Interview: _____ End time of Interview: _____

Introduction to Interview: Context	(5-10 minutes)
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1. Appreciation & Introduction

Thank you very much for making time to share your insights and experiences. I am very grateful that you are willing to talk with me about your experiences as a teacher-leader, again. Also, thank you for signing and returning the consent form. I just want to confirm once more—is it still okay with you for me to audio-record our interview? Just to confirm and out of respect for honoring your time I have planned approximately 60-90 minutes for this interview. Is that your understanding too? Do you have any questions about the consent form or anything else at this time? [If yes, I will answer the question. If no, then I will say: “OK, great. Then, let’s get started—I want to make the most of your time.”]

2. Overview of Our Purpose and Goals

Thank you again for taking the time to sit down with me. As a gentle reminder, I invited you to participate in this research study called “Re-Storying a Profession to Flourish: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study with North Carolina Teacher-Leaders.” Today, we will complete the final interview that should last 60-90 minutes, but feel free to stop at any time for any reason.

I am doing this study to learn more about *your* perspective regarding how you, as a practicing teacher-leader, describe and understand your own flourishing in your career, if you do at all, and the supports and challenges you may have experienced that helped and/or hindered your flourishing, if you do at all. For this study, I think of flourishing as experiences that involve purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and play/joy, and I am eager to learn your personal description and understanding of your own flourishing, if you do at all. There are no right or wrong answers; rather I will be talking with you to better understand *your personal experience*. Thank you *so very much*, in advance, for your help and time.

3. Confidentiality

In any publications, I will disguise your name and honor confidentiality. I may quote things that you say but I will never use your name unless I have your permission. I’d also like to remind you that you do not have to answer any question that you prefer not to answer.

4. Questions

Do you have any questions before we begin? If you have questions at any time, please let me know

5. Review

For a quick refresher, last time I learned about your journey here and a bit about your National Board Certification experience. Now, I am excited to review the transcripts from the first two interviews and then jump into a few more reflective questions regarding the first two interviews.

6. Member Check

To review the transcripts first, I would love to hear or see about any adjustments, questions, or concerns you have about them. Is that okay? Also, before we get started, I wanted to ask a few lingering questions and clarifying questions based on a few things you said.

So, let's begin our last interview.

Section 1: Reminders and Reflections (45- 60)

1. Would you say that there's a general understanding, among your colleagues here, as to what would be enough to have a **successful** a career here?

Probe:

- 1.1. If YES: What do you think that is?
- 1.2. If NO: What are some possible interpretations?
- 1.3. Why did you stay beyond those three and, four, years after paying back teaching fellows?

2. Would you say that there's a general understanding, among your colleagues here, as to what would be enough to end a career here?

Probe:

- a. If YES: What do you think that is?
 - b. If NO: What are some possible interpretations?
 - c. Why did you stay beyond those three and, four, years after paying back teaching fellows?
 - d. Mention the concept of struggle as a possible lens.
2. Can you please take a look at that pie chart that you filled out earlier. How do you think that a representative of this school – the principal, or your colleagues, for example – might fill it out to reflect *their* ideal for your work and life as a teacher?

Probe:

- 1.1. Can you explain each section?
3. I'd like you to think of a teacher whom you admire – not because of their teaching or their leadership, but because they have constructed a career that you think is of value as you define it. Can you think of anyone like that?

Probe:

- 1.1. IF YES, can you tell me about that person? Why do they stick out for you?
- 1.2. IF NO, what might such person's career look like?
- 1.3. Can you identify any particular tools, or things they have done, that you think have

allowed them to build their career and their professional life in the way they have?

4. From our time together, I gathered your understanding of flourishing is [interviewer words]. Do you agree or disagree? Please explain.
5. Can you tell me more about the relationships or structures you found helped you feel engaged your first years teaching, NBCT year(s), and recently (2016-2017)?
6. Can you tell me more about the people or things you found hindered you feel engaged your first years teaching, NBCT year(s), and recently (2016-2017)?
7. If you were to do a study on flourishing of teacher-leaders throughout their careers, what questions would you have asked? Any that I did or didn't? Here is a sheet of paper, before we close, I would love for you to write down whatever questions come to mind.
8. In summary, when you think back through our interviews together, why do you believe you stay and flourish as the teacher? Do you feel those two things are similar and/or different. Explain.

Section 2: Closing (20-25 minutes)

1. And, my last question if you feel comfortable sharing, is what did you learn about yourself as a beginning teacher, through the NBCT process, and in your recent role? (10 minutes)

Probes: If not mentioned, remember to follow up on:

- a. As a person?
- b. Anything else?
2. Is there anything else you want to tell me about any of the questions I've asked?
3. Do you have any questions for me?
4. If I have any further questions, would you be willing to talk with me between now and the next interview?
5. I would like to send you a copy of the transcript of this interview for you to review for accuracy. Will that be OK?

_____ YES

_____ NO

Finally, thank you so much for your time. I know you have an extremely busy schedule, and I appreciate your carving out some time, and I look forward to our second interview in a few weeks.

Appendix D

Letter to Informant



Saunders, Chelsey <cls2202@tc.columbia.edu>

Mar 10 ☆



to dthilman, bcc: Chelsey ▾

Dear Mr. Thilman,

I hope you are doing well.

To reintroduce myself, my name is Chelsey Saunders, and we met when I interviewed with you to work at Cary High. My impetus was both because my sister, Cameron, had enjoyed you as her principal, and because I cherished my experience at CHS and wanted to give back. Unfortunately, you did not have any English openings at the time, but I was lucky to teach at Broughton.

We re-connected briefly this last summer at WakeEd's "Beyond the Bucks" talk with Barnett Berry, and I had hoped to meet you for lunch before I returned to New York City but ran out of time. I am at dissertation proposal stage for my PhD in Education Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University, and I am coming back to Raleigh for my spring break on March 14. My great hope would be to take you to lunch or coffee one day that week to learn from your expertise, both as a principal and in your current position. I know this may not be enough notice to have a full hour of your time as you are incredibly busy, but I would be so grateful for 15-20 minutes if you can spare them at any time between Tuesday, March 15 and Friday, March 19.

In full transparency, I would still love to give back to Wake County, so my hope is to do my dissertation research on teachers there, but before I jump in, I thought learning from you would be a best first step. Thank you, in advance, for considering, and please let me know, at your convenience, if there is any time in your schedule to catch up.

Gratefully,

Chelsey Saunders
[919.280.0803](tel:919.280.0803)

Appendix E

Informed Consent

Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York NY 10027
212 678 3000
www.tc.edu

INFORMED CONSENT

Protocol Title: Re-Storying a Profession to Flourish: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study with North Carolina Teacher-Leaders

Principal Investigator: Chelsey Saunders, M.Ed., Teachers College, Columbia University

INTRODUCTION

You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Re-Storying a Profession to Flourish: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study North Carolina Teacher-Leaders.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are over 18 years old, have taught for a minimum of 10 years, are an NC Teaching Fellow, and have earned National Board Certification. Approximately 8-12 people will participate in this study and it will take 3- 4.5 hours of your time to complete.

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

I am doing this study to learn more about *your* perspective regarding how you, as a practicing teacher-leader, describe and understand your own flourishing in your career, if you do at all, and the supports and challenges you may have experienced that helped and/or hindered your flourishing, if you do at all. For this study, I think of flourishing as experiences that involve purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and play/joy, and I am eager to learn your personal description and understanding of your own flourishing, if you do at all. There are no right or wrong answers; rather I will be talking with you to better understand *your personal experience*. Thank you *so very much*, in advance, for your help and time.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to voluntarily participate in three different interviews at three different times. During the interviews, you will be asked to discuss your graduate education experience and your experience as a classroom teacher. These interviews will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is written down the audio-recording will be deleted.

<p>Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board</p> <p>Protocol Number: 17-194 Consent Form Approved Until: 02/20/2018</p>
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If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. Each interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Together, we will choose pseudonym or false name/de-identified code to keep your identity confidential. Finally, I will ask you to share documents related to your teaching experience such as National Board Certification entries, if you wish. All of these procedures will be at times scheduled outside of teaching hours between you and the Principal Investigator, Chelsey Saunders, in spring 2017.

WHAT POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss challenges that you experienced in school or while working in your National Board Certification and you also may feel slight stress if/when discussing ways you may not be flourishing. **However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don't want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.** You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to your principal. I, as the principal investigator, am taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.

WHAT POSSIBLE BENEFITS CAN I EXPECT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

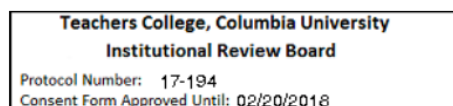
There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR BEING IN THIS STUDY?

You will not be paid to participate; however, your time is appreciated. There are no costs to you for taking part in this study.

WHEN IS THE STUDY OVER? CAN I LEAVE THE STUDY BEFORE IT ENDS?

The study is over when you have completed the interviews. However, you can leave the study at any time even if you haven't finished.



PROTECTION OF YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

The investigator will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. Any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) will be stored on a computer that is password protected. What is on the audio-recording will be written down and the audio-recording will then be destroyed. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym as soon as I have completed the dissertation. **Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years, and I will keep the data for five years after completion of the dissertation for use in publications** Given the ranking of Wake County Public School System as having the most National Board Certified Teachers in the nation for nine years and its human capital goal within their 2020 Strategic Plan “to identify, recruit, develop, and retain highly effective talent,” it is reasonable to cite the district by name for this study in future publications; however, as previously stated, all identifiers of participants will be stored separately in a master list that I will destroy upon completing the dissertation.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The results of this study will be published in journals and presented at academic conferences. Your name or any identifying information about you will not be published. This study is being conducted as part of the dissertation of the principal investigator. **Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years, and I will keep the data for five years after completion of the dissertation for use in publications**

WHO MAY VIEW MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY

___ I consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed at an educational setting or at a conference outside of Teachers College _____
Signature

___ I **do not** consent to allow written, video and/or audio taped materials viewed outside of Teachers College Columbia University _____
Signature

Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board Protocol Number: 17-194 Consent Form Approved Until: 02/20/2018

OPTIONAL CONSENT FOR FUTURE CONTACT

The investigator may wish to contact you in the future. Please initial the appropriate statements to indicate whether or not you give permission for future contact.

I give permission to be contacted in the future for research purposes:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

I give permission to be contacted in the future for information relating to this study:

Yes _____ No _____
Initial Initial

WHO CAN ANSWER MY QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS STUDY?

If you have any questions about taking part in this research study, you should contact the principal investigator, Chelsey Saunders, 919-280-0803. You can also contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Ellie Drago-Severson 212-678-4163.

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you should contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (the human research ethics committee) at 212-678-4105 or email IRB@tc.edu. Or you can write to the IRB at Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th Street, New York, NY 1002. The IRB is the committee that oversees human research protection for Teachers College, Columbia University.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

- I have read and discussed the informed consent with the researcher. I have had ample opportunity to ask questions about the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits regarding this research study.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw participation at any time without penalty.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at his or her professional discretion under any conditions.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information that has been developed becomes available which may relate to my willingness to continue my participation, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from the research study that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- I should receive a copy of the Informed Consent document.

<p>Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board Protocol Number: 17-194 Consent Form Approved Until: 02/20/2018</p>

My signature means that I agree to participate in this study

Print name: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature: _____

<p>Teachers College, Columbia University Institutional Review Board Protocol Number: 17-194 Consent Form Approved Until: 02/20/2018</p>

Appendix F

Invitation to Participate

Dear Ms./Mr. [Last Name],

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The study, entitled *Re-Storying a Profession to Flourish: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study with North Carolina Teacher-Leaders*, strives to understand how teachers describe and understand their teaching, leading, and flourishing. I am especially interested in considering how teachers describe their own flourishing and the supports and challenges throughout their career that helped or hindered their own flourishing. The study will include teachers who are National Board Certified and NC Teaching Fellows from at least two to three different high schools in Wake County, NC. I am conducting this dissertation study as part of my program of work as a doctoral candidate in the Education Leadership PhD program in the Department of Organization and Leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University.

Your participation would consist of three interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each. In order to better understand your work, I will also ask you for a copy of any materials you find relevant to your leadership, such as your National Board Certification submissions. I have attached an Informed Consent with further information and details. If you agree to participate and allow me to record our interviews, I will need your signature as confirmation before we can begin. If you do not agree to recording, then you cannot participate in this study.

Your privacy and confidentiality are very important to me. I will treat the interviews with the utmost confidentiality, and only I will have access to your identity. Your identity and the identities of any individuals you mention will be masked, as will your school's name. I will not share your name or the names of any study participants with anyone within your institution or elsewhere. Pseudonyms and other identity masking techniques will be used in all presentations or writings about the study. In addition, I will ask you if you want to further mask other features of your identity or work and personal experiences, and I will ensure that I have followed your preferences. With permission from Wake County Public School System, the district will be the only identifying information. Again, this is described in detail in the attached Informed Consent Form.

I hope that you might be willing to participate in the study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider participation. I will follow up with you, in a few days, to invite your participation in this study and to respond to any questions you might have. Or please feel free to contact me directly at Chelsey.saunders@tc.columbia.edu.

Gratefully,

Chelsey Saunders, M. Ed.
919.280.0803

Appendix G

Preliminary Codes

Key Terms and Preliminary Codes:

1. Flourishing: Purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and play/joy
 - a. Purpose
 - i. Meaning/Calling
 - ii. Emotions
 - iii. Well-being
 - iv. Hope
 - b. Passion
 - i. Engage
 - ii. Critical Pedagogy
 - c. Play/Joy
 - i. Self-Care
 - ii. Compassion
 - iii. Positivity
2. NCTF: North Carolina Teaching Fellow
3. PP: Pillar Practices (Teaming, Mentoring, Tapping for Leadership, and Collegial Inquiry)
 - a. PPT: Teaming
 - b. PPM: Mentoring
 - c. PPL: Tapping for Leadership
 - d. PPI: Collegial Inquiry
 - e. (s) Listed as support
 - f. (c) Listed as challenge
 - g. (AC) Adaptive Challenge
 - h. (TC) Technical Challenge

Appendix H

Ways of Knowing

Characteristics of Ways of Knowing Most Common in Adulthood

Way of Knowing→	Instrumental (Rule Based)	Socializing	Self-Authoring (Reflective Self)
Underlying Thought Structure <i>Subject (S):</i> what a person is identified with <i>Object (O):</i> what the self can reflect on and take a perspective on	S: Needs, interests, wishes O: Impulses, perceptions	S: The interpersonal, mutuality O: Needs, interests, wishes	S: Authorship, identity, psychic administration, ideology O: The interpersonal, mutuality
How the self defines itself	Orients to self-interests, purposes, wants, desires, and concrete needs.	Orients to valued others' (external authority) expectations, values and opinions.	Orients to self's values, internal authority.
Orienting concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on rules and the "right" way to do things. • Decisions are based on what the self will acquire. • Others are experienced as helpers or obstacles to getting one's own concrete needs met. • A person does not yet have the capacity for abstract thinking or for making generalizations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dependence on external authority, acceptance and affiliation are crucial. • Self is defined by important others' expectations and judgments. • Self orients to inner states. • Self feels responsible for other's feelings; holds others responsible for own feelings. • Criticism and conflict are threats to the self. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self generates and replies on internal values and standards. • Criticism is evaluated and used according to internal standards. • Concern with one's own competence and performance is ultimate. • Self can hold contradictory feelings simultaneously. • Conflict is a natural part of work and life and can enhance one's own perspective and help to achieve larger organizational/team goals.
Guiding questions and concerns for self	"Will I get punished?" "What's in it for me?"	"Will you (a valued other/authority) still like/love/value me?" "Will you (a valued other/authority) still think I am a good person?"	"Am I maintaining my own standards and values?" "Am I competent?" "Am I living, working, and loving to the best of my ability?" "Am I achieving my goals and being guided by my ideals?"

SOURCE: Adapted from Drago-Severson, E. (2004b). *Helping Teachers Learn: Principal Leadership for Adult Growth and Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin Press. "Underlying Thought Structure," Row 1 of Table 1, is from Kegan (1982) *The Evolving Self* (pp. 86–87).

Appendix I

Teachers College IRB Application

Section I: PROTOCOL DESCRIPTION (Please answer each question in the space below it)

1. Please describe the purpose of your research. Provide relevant background information and scientific justification for your study. You may provide citations as necessary.

Purpose:

The purpose of this qualitative in-depth interview study is to understand how a group of 8-12 teacher-leaders in Wake County, NC public high schools describe and understand their own flourishing, if they do at all, at different points in their career (i.e., first three years, during their National Board Certification process (\geq four years), and in the most recent academic year (2016-2017)). In addition, I seek to learn the supports and challenges that help and/or hinder their flourishing in order to inform public policy and educational leaders as to how to not only retain excellent teachers but also help them thrive throughout long careers.

To do so, I will invite 12 teacher-leaders to participate voluntarily in my qualitative interview study (Maxwell, 2013; Miles et al., 2014; Seidman, 2013) with the hope of at least 8-12 as committed participants will be able to participate in all three 60-90 minute interviews (see Appendix A Interview Protocol #1, Appendix B Interview Protocol #2, and Appendix C Interview Protocol #3 for more information) over 2 to 3 months. I will also ask that they submit documents for review that they feel describe their practice, such as submissions to the National Board Certification (see Appendix A Interview Protocol 1 for script).

Background/Justification:

The justification for this study is that attrition has tripled in North Carolina since 2010 (State Board of Education, 2015) and 50-60% of teachers quit within first five years of teaching nationwide (R. Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014), which negatively impacts student performance (Ronfeldt et al., 2013) and costs billions of dollars (Alliance for Education, 2014). Therefore, our nation faces a looming teacher shortage crisis that has already hit our hardest-to-serve areas (Sutcher et al., 2016). Importantly, in the midst of this crisis, Wake County Public School System, my proposed site for my research, has had more National Board Certified Teachers and at most a 14% turnover over the last nine years (Wake County Public School System, 2016). Therefore, I seek to garner insights from current teacher-leaders in this district to see, how, if at all, it is possible to “re-story” (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 202) the profession of teaching. Re-story for this study means to replace the deficit narratives of teaching as an *embattled* profession in which teachers are replaceable widgets (Goldstein, 2015; Weisberg et al., 2009) to teaching as a vocation through the lens of flourishing.

Note: I will seek IRB approval from Wake County Public School system upon receipt of approval from Teachers College, Columbia University. Through information gathering (i.e. phone calls to Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources (See Appendix D: Letter to Gate Keeper) and phone conversations with Brad McMillan Wake County’s IRB Data and Accountability Officer), I learned of these procedures and received cautious optimism that the study would be favorably approved because of its alignment with their Strategic Vision 2020 to recruit and retain excellent teachers. This is pending TC’s IRB approval. To be clear, I have not sent any invitations or made contact with potential participants.

Definitions of Key Terms:

Re-story: To critically explore a new, strengths-based narrative and a thematic re-telling of teachers' lived experiences of human flourishing (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, p. 202).

Teacher-leaders, for this study, are teachers who are “galvanized by the desire to improve and thus ensure learning for all students” (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015, p. 64). They are educated by universities as North Carolina Teaching Fellows, and they earned National Board Certification thus showing a commitment to their profession. They have also taught for at least 10 years, so they have stayed since if not before the Great Recession.

North Carolina Teaching Fellows: A program that paid full scholarships to high school students for four year universities and in return the students taught in NC for at least four years. The program offered ongoing professional development and research shows are among the best and brightest teachers in NC (Henry, Bastian, et al., 2012). There accepted approximately 50,000 Teaching Fellows between 1986 – 2011. Only the NC Public Forum has a full list of these teachers.

National Board Certification: Created by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, this certification process is reserved for teachers who complete multiple benchmarks, a test, reflective writing, etc. They cannot begin this process until they have taught for at least three years, and they submit these to their peers for review. In some states, like North Carolina, a 12% raise comes with earning this elite certification. Research also shows that National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) are among our most experienced teachers and tend to have higher student achievement than their non-certified peers (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Petty et al., 2016). Wake County Public Schools Human Resources Department may have a list of these for pay increase reasons in addition to the NBCT Coordinator CarolAnne Wade. Neither of these two groups have an active list of NC Teaching Fellows, however.

Supports and Challenges: From constructive-developmental theory's foundation (Kegan, 1982, 1994, 2009), Drago-Severson's (2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2016) research found that the Pillar Practices can help create *holding environments*, or developmentally appropriate relationships and structures for adults who have qualitatively different ways of making meaning, which she calls *ways of knowing*. I refer to her Pillar Practices of mentorship, teams, tapping for leadership, and collegial inquiry groups as possible supports and challenges that may help and/or hinder flourishing as they do growth.

Flourishing: The concept of flourishing is art of *living well and doing well for self and others*, as Aristotle's eudemonia first described (Aristotle & Sachs, 2002). Through an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2016), I operationalized flourishing into three strands: *Purpose* is the meaning people attribute to their lives and relationships (Bell, 2016; Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Haidt, 2006; Hansen, 1994; Higgins, 2011; Nouwen, 2014; Seligman, 2011); *passion* is the flow and engagement people sense in their work (Conway, 2012; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Fredrickson, 2009; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003); and *play* is the joy, self-care, and positivity inherent in the experience of flourishing (Brown, 2013; Cherkowski & Walker, 2016; Fredrickson, 2009; Losada, 1999).

2. Federal guidelines state that research cannot exclude any classes of subjects without scientific justification. Will your study purposely exclude any classes of subjects (e.g. by gender, class, race or age)? If so, please justify.

The selection criteria of at least 10 years of teaching experience limits the age range of participants. The justification is that this study focuses on veteran or career teachers who have stayed in teaching longer

than five years, when fifty percent quit (R. Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014). In addition, research shows that veterans teachers who are leaders in their schools positively influence student outcomes and are even stronger assets to schools as veterans due to their ability to decrease absenteeism and increase collegiality between colleagues (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Wyckoff, 2015; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). The reason for at least 10 years versus five years is because teachers with 10 years of experience have been teaching since the Great Recession of 2008, so they have witnessed the drastic change of public funding and decrease of resources provided by the legislature which influenced the departure of many NC teachers (Speaks, 2014).

3. Please state your research question (in one or two sentences, if possible).

1. How, if at all, do 8-12 National Board Certified NC Teaching Fellows currently serving in secondary public schools in Wake County, NC describe and understand their own flourishing (i.e., in the beginning years teaching (1-3 years), in the National Board Certification process (after year four), and in the last academic year (2016-2017)?
2. How, if at all, do these NC teacher-leaders describe and understand the supports and/or challenges that help their flourishing?
3. How, if at all, do these NC teacher-leaders describe and understand the supports and/or challenges that hinder their flourishing?

4. Please describe the *specific data* you plan to collect and explain how data and the subjects you choose will help to answer your research question/s.

To collect data, I will administer three qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews, 60-90 minutes each, (Seidman, 2013) with 8-12 teachers from at least three different public high schools in Wake County, North Carolina. To narrow the participant pool, teacher-leaders are NC Teaching Fellows and National Board Certified as these two programs develop teacher-leaders, the focus of my study. They will be allowed to leave the interview series at any time they wish (see Appendix E Informed Consent). With 12 participants, I will collect a minimum of 36 hours of interviews. The first interview will be in person at the location of their choosing. The subsequent two interviews will be over the phone or via Skype. After receiving informed consent, I will record and transcribe verbatim these interviews and upload them to NVivo on a secure computer.

In addition, I will conduct a document review (see Appendix A Interview Protocol #1) by asking participants to digitally send me previous submissions for their National Board Certification process, which are often shared documents among colleagues, and any school materials or written documents to better understand the personal and social context of each participant (Maxwell, 2013).

Section II: DESCRIPTION OF RECRUITMENT AND PROCEDURES

5. Please describe your recruitment methods. **How** and **where** will subjects be recruited (flyers, announcement/s, word-of-mouth, snowballing, etc.)? You will need to include your IRB Protocol number in all recruitment materials, including announcements, online and email text. Paper copies of submitted recruitment materials to be distributed will be stamped with your IRB Protocol number once your study has been approved.

Who/Where: With the participant criteria of currently teaching public high school teachers in Wake County, NC with at least 10 years of experience in addition to being National Board Certified and NC Teaching Fellows, I was able to cross-check lists provided by the Public School Foundation of NC, who has now taken over the records of the NC Teaching Fellows. While the district itself would have to cross-

check their records for this information as they only have the lists separately, I found out of 591 teachers who met the criteria for the district, at least 54 potential participants. I then narrowed the number from 21 schools based on homogenous factors of at least 2,000 students, at least 100 teachers, and similar free and reduced lunch percentages to 6 schools and 26 teachers. From that, I will invite 12 participants from at least three schools for minimal diversity between contexts. My hope will be to have at least 8 consistent participants.

How: Upon receiving IRB approval from TC, I will request IRB approval from Wake County Public Schools (WCPSS). Upon receiving approval from WCPSS, I will then e-mail and invite potential teacher-leaders to volunteer to participate in three 60-90 minute interviews with an attachment of an informed consent form. Afterwards, I will follow up with a phone call to address any questions they have and explain how I will do my best to protect confidentiality. I will attach the informed consent and the IRB protocol number once approved to all correspondence. (See Appendix E Informed Consent and Appendix F Invitation to Participate.)

Note to Clarify: I will seek IRB approval from Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) upon receipt of approval from Teachers College, Columbia University to not only conduct research there with 12 teacher-leaders in at least 3 of their 21 high schools, but also to justify identifying the district in this research and future publications. The justification is that WCPSS is the number one district in the nation for highest number of National Board Certified teachers for the last nine years (NCDPI, 2014) and this study aligns with their human capital goal within their 2020 Strategic Plan “to identify, recruit, develop, and retain highly effective talent” (wcpss.net). Please see Appendix E Informed Consent to see same language for participants. Additionally, information on NBCTs are not readily available to the public and the NC Teaching Fellow list is only housed at the North Carolina Public School Forum.

6. Are you recruiting subjects from institutions other than Teachers College? If so, documentation of permission or pending IRB approval from the institution/s is required with this submission.

Wake County Public School System requires IRB approval from the home institution for External Research prior to approval (see Note in Question 5). They have a separate digital form. I have already written out the answers to their questions, which I will submit as soon as I receive approval from TC. (See Appendix J Wake County Public School System IRB Application for more information)

7. How many subjects are you planning to recruit?

I plan to recruit 12 participants with the hope of having at least 8 finish the complete process of three interviews. I realize that there may be some attrition; therefore, I am seeking 12.

8. Please list what *activities* your subject will be engaging in (e.g. surveys, focus groups, interviews, diagnostic procedures, etc.). **[PLEASE NOTE:** If you are collecting any private medical information from your subjects, please see our website www.tc.edu/irb under Forms and Guidelines for the HIPAA consent document.]

Name of activity	# of times the activity occurs	Duration of activity per instance	Total time period of active participation per subject (days, weeks, etc.)	Describe the Data collected

Interview	36 hours (3 per participant)	60-90 min/each	3 hours – 4.5 hours/ participant over 2-3 months	Recorded and Transcribed Interviews
Document Review	1-5	15-20 minutes	NA	Entries for National Board Certification, Journal writings, etc.

Total hours of participation: 3 -4.5 hours Duration of participation: 2-3 months

9. Where will your data collection take place specifically (e.g., in classroom, outside of classroom, waiting room, office, other location)?

Interviews will occur at location of participants' choosing, outside of school hours, for the first round and by phone or Skype for subsequent sessions.

10. Will subjects be remunerated for their participation? If, so please describe. **[PLEASE NOTE:** If using a lottery system, please remember to state odds of winning in consent form. Also, if you will be offering course credit for study participation, you must discuss this here and include the alternative assignment for those who decline to participate in the study].

No, participants will not be remunerated for their participation. As a small token of appreciation, each participant will receive a thank you note upon completion of the third interview.

11. Will deception be used? If so, please provide a rationale for its use. How will subjects be debriefed afterward? Submit debriefing script. Scripts should include a statement that gives your subjects the opportunity to withdraw their participation at that time. **[PLEASE NOTE:** studies involving deception are given **Full Board Review** unless the deception is minor and risks are minimal].

No. (See Appendix A, B, and C for Interview Protocols #1, #2, and #3 respectively)

12. Will you have a control group? Please describe your procedures and explain the purpose of using a control group.

No.

13. Will you be videotaping your subjects? If so, please describe in detail. **[PLEASE NOTE:** The IRB will only approve videotaping when there is adequate scientific and ethical justification].

No.

Section III: CONFIDENTIALITY PROCEDURES

14. How will you ensure the subjects' confidentiality? Describe in detail your plans for ensuring confidentiality of data regarding subjects. **[PLEASE NOTE: If you will be remunerating subjects after their participation, please make it clear if and how you will link their names/contact information confidentially to their compensation].**

I, as the investigator, will keep all written materials locked in a desk drawer in a locked office. I will store any electronic or digital information (including audio recordings) on a computer that is password protected. I will destroy the audio-recording after I have had it transcribed and written down. There will be no record matching your real name with your pseudonym. **Regulations require that research data be kept for at least three years, and I will keep the data for five years after completion of the dissertation for use in publications.**

Given the ranking of Wake County Public School System as having the most National Board Certified Teachers in the nation for nine years and its human capital goal within their 2020 Strategic Plan "to identify, recruit, develop, and retain highly effective talent," it is reasonable to cite the district by name for this study in future publications (wcpss.net); however, as previously stated, all identifiers of participants will be stored separately in a master list that I will destroy upon completing the dissertation.

15. If you will be audio/videotaping, please state how you will ensure that subjects have consented to being recorded, **and** if some subjects do not consent to being recorded, explain how you will protect their confidentiality. (This must also be clearly stated in your consent form/s).

As stated in the Informed Consent Form (Appendix E), I will ask each participant to volunteer to sign the Informed Consent Form to give me permission to record and transcribe verbatim the audio recording. If they do not consent through their signature on the Informed Consent Form or if they change their mind at any time during the interviews, then they will not be able to participate. See Appendix E Informed Consent Form.

16. Will data be collected anonymously? Will you be able to link the data? If data will not be collected anonymously, how will subjects' identity/ information be protected? (e.g. codes, pseudonyms, masking of information, etc.)?

I will not collect the data anonymously. To do my best to protect confidentiality, however, I will use pseudonyms to keep information confidential. I will also keep the master list separate from the recorded and transcribed data. All connecting data will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation. Additionally, I will use vague school demographics and descriptors to mask identifiable information in any publication. These measures will attend to protecting the subjects' identities and de-couple personal identifiers from collected data.

17. Where will coding and data materials be stored (e.g. 'in a locked file cabinet in the Principal Investigator's home or office')?

I will use password protected digital drop box and Mahara for all interview notes, transcriptions, and recordings. NVivo will also be protected on the laptop with password access. All hard copy files will be in a locked drawer in a locked office. I will store the data for five years after the completion of the dissertation, while regulations require at least three years. I will then destroy the data.

18. Will you need bilingual interpreters or interviewers, and if so, what will you do to ensure confidentiality of the subjects? What are your procedures for recruiting interpreters/interviewers? Indicate the name of the interpreter/interviewer and for whom he/she works. Submit copies of all questionnaires or interview questions for each subject population.

No.

SECTION IV: DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH RISKS & BENEFITS

19. What are the potential risks, if any, (physical, psychological, social, legal, or other) to your subjects? What is the likelihood of these risks occurring, and/or their seriousness? How will you work to minimize them? [**PLEASE NOTE:** The IRB regards no research involving human subjects as risk-free. You may describe minimal risks for your study (such as discomfort, boredom, fatigue, etc.), or state that the research will involve minimal risk, similar to an activity (named) like that which participants will perform as part of your study.]

The risks involved with participation in this study are no more than one would experience in regular daily activities. I will minimize risk by reminding the participant of the informed consent which explains the following (retrieved from Appendix E Informed Consent):

“This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss challenges that you experienced in school or while working in your National Board Certification and you also may feel slight stress if/when discussing ways you may not be flourishing. **However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don’t want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty.** You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to your principal. I, as the principal investigator, am taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.”

20. What are your plans for ensuring necessary intervention in the event of a distressed subject and/or your referral sources if there is a need for psychological and/or physical treatment/assistance?

I will have the names and numbers of local counselors and psychologists, and emergency aid to give them if they need it. I will pay careful attention to this.

21. What are your qualifications/preparations that enable you to estimate and minimize risk to subjects?

The qualifications that enable me to estimate and minimize the risk of this study include intensive qualitative methods training through multiple courses with tenured professors at Teachers College, Columbia University:

ORLA 7503, fall 2013, Drago-Severson;
EDPA 4050, fall 2013, Riehl;
ORL 6500, spring 2014, Yorks;
ORLA 7501, fall 2015, Drago-Severson;

ORLD 7500, spring 2015, Volpe; &
C&T 5502, fall 2015, Knight-Manuel;
ORL 5521, spring 2016, Conway;
IND 5199, summer 2016, Smith, Sealey-Ruiz & Vasudavan.
ORL 6501, fall 2016, Marsick/Maltbia,

Importantly, I conduct this study as a PhD Candidate under the supervision of Dr. Ellie Drago-Severson, my sponsor and adviser. In addition, Dr. Ellie Drago-Severson, Dr. Megan Lavery, and the Department Chair of the Department of Organization and Leadership, Dr. Bill Baldwin, signed their approval of the proposal and the methodology to confirm the minimal risk to participants. My experience as a research assistant for Dr. Drago-Severson and a former teacher-leader also prepared me for this work.

22. What are the potential benefits of this study to the subjects? Most research conducted at TC provides NO DIRECT BENEFIT to participants and must be STATED as such in the INFORMED CONSENT FORM. Occasionally, study design will include a diagnosis, evaluation, screening, counseling or training, etc., that have a concrete benefit to participants, independent of the nature or results of a research study that may be listed below. Benefits such as “an opportunity to reflect,” “helping to advance knowledge,” etc., ARE NOT BENEFITS and MUST NOT be included in this section.

There is no direct benefit, which is stated in the Informed Consent (See Appendix E).

Section V: INFORMED CONSENT PROCEDURES (Please use the templates on the website in preparing your consent form/s, and note that Informed consent is a process, not a form).

23. What are your procedures for obtaining subject’s informed consent to participate in the research?

I will email the participants the informed consent, talk with each of them by phone if they wish, and then review the Informed Consent in person and on the phone before conducting each of the three interviews. I will remind them of it before each interview and ask if they have questions. And, I will also request their signature before beginning any recordings of interviews or collection of documents. See Appendix E for Informed Consent.

24. How will you describe your research to potential subjects? [**Please note:** if working with a population under eight (8) years of age, a script is necessary.]

As in Appendix E Informed Consent, I will explain the research this way:

“You are being invited to participate in this research study called “Re-Storying a Profession to Flourish: A Qualitative In-Depth Interview Study North Carolina Teacher-Leaders.” You may qualify to take part in this research study because you are over 18 years old, have taught for a minimum of 10 years, are an NC Teaching Fellow, and have earned National Board Certification. Approximately 8-12 people will participate in this study and it will take 3- 4.5 hours of your time to complete.

I am doing this study to learn more about your perspective regarding how you, as a practicing teacher-leader, describe and understand your own flourishing in your career, if you do at all, and the supports and challenges you may have experienced that helped and/or hindered your

flourishing, if you do at all. For this study, I think of flourishing as experiences that involve purpose/meaning, passion/engagement, and play/joy, and I am eager to learn your personal description and understanding of your own flourishing, if you do at all. There are no right or wrong answers; rather I will be talking with you to better understand your personal experience. Thank you so very much, in advance, for your help and time.

If you decide to participate, I will invite you to voluntarily participate in three different interviews at three different times. During the interviews, you will be asked to discuss your graduate education experience and your experience as a classroom teacher. These interview will be audio-recorded. After the audio-recording is written down the audio-recording will be deleted. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded, you will not be able to participate. Each interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Together, we will choose pseudonym or false name/de-identified code in order to keep your identity confidential. Finally, I will ask you to share documents related to your teaching experience such as National Board Certification entries, if you wish. All of these procedures will be at times scheduled outside of teaching hours between you and the Principal Investigator, Chelsey Saunders, in spring 2017.

This is a minimal risk study, which means the harms or discomforts that you may experience are not greater than you would ordinarily encounter in daily life while taking routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. However, there are some risks to consider. You might feel embarrassed to discuss challenges that you experienced in school or while working in your National Board Certification and you also may feel slight stress if/when discussing ways you may not be flourishing. However, you do not have to answer any questions or divulge anything you don't want to talk about. You can stop participating in the study at any time without penalty. You might feel concerned that things you say might get back to your principal. I, as the principal investigator, am taking precautions to keep your information confidential and prevent anyone from discovering or guessing your identity, such as using a pseudonym instead of your name and keeping all information on a password protected computer and locked in a file drawer.”

I will also offer a brief description in the invitation to participate (See Appendix F Invitation to Participate) that offers an abbreviated version of above. The Informed Consent will be an attachment to this invitation.

25. What will you do to ensure subjects' understanding of the study and what it involves?

I will explain my research in the informed consent (see Appendix E Informed Consent), and I will send the interview protocol in advance of the interview so participants have time to read and review it to form questions and answers. I will also provide multiple opportunities for them to ask questions before, after, and during the interviews. I will also offer to talk by phone to address any and all questions.

26. If you are recruiting students from a classroom during normal school hours, what will the **alternative** activities be for those who wish not to participate? (This should also appear in your consent form/s)

Not Applicable

27. Use this section to provide a request for a full or partial waiver of informed consent, and justify this request. You may site criteria from the following link regarding Federal regulations and guidelines: <http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html#46.116>

Not Applicable

Note for Researchers: Submit all consent forms/scripts, using the templates provided on the website.

Drafts of consent forms will not be accepted. Each consent form must be a separate document and titled for its respective subject population (e.g. teachers, parents, etc.). All consent documents must be in English, even though you may translate them. **All consent documents should be printed on Teachers College letterhead or include the name and address of the college, per the online Informed Consent and Participant's Rights templates.**

Important Attachments Referenced in IRB Application:

Appendix A Interview Protocol #1

Appendix B Interview Protocol #2

Appendix C Interview Protocol #3

Appendix D Letter to Informant

Appendix E Informed Consent

Appendix F Invitation to Participate

Appendix I Teachers College IRB Application

Appendix J Wake County Public School System IRB Application

Appendix J

Wake County Public Schools IRB Application

Note: Official Application Available online: www.wcpss.net/domain/2395d

Proposal Overview (please limit each response to 150 words or fewer)

Provide a short narrative of the motivation behind this proposal, its primary research question, and its hypothesis.

As a former WCPSS school student, NC Teaching Fellow, and National Board Certified Teacher, I am motivated to help the district secure the best, brightest, and most effective teacher-leaders possible. I left teaching to pursue a doctorate at Teachers College, Columbia University in Education Leadership with the hope of becoming a voice for teacher education and development. Plus, because of recent teacher-turnover trends, and NC's teacher attrition tripling since 2010 (State Board of Education, 2016), I seek to learn how some teachers stay despite many of the 21st century challenges. Therefore, the primary research question is: How, if at all, do 8-10 National Board Certified Teachers who are NC Teaching Fellows in secondary public schools in Wake County, North Carolina describe and understand their experiences of flourishing (i.e. in the beginning years teaching (1-3), in the National Board Certification process, and in the last academic year)? **(146)**

Describe the scope of your proposed study. Include, where applicable, participant types (e.g. students, staff, parents, schools), relevant subgroups, subjects, sample sizes, and duration.

The methodology for my dissertation study is a qualitative, in-depth interview study (Maxwell, 2013) because I am asking *how* questions related to meaning-making and thick descriptions of experiences (Geertz, 1973). Participant criteria for this study are teachers who are NC Teaching Fellows, National Board Certified, and have taught for at least 10 years. Over 500 teachers fit these criteria, so I will then narrow it to high school teachers as this is my area of expertise. To collect data, I will invite 12 teachers from 2-3 schools in WCPSS, with the goal of learning from at least 8 participants. I will adapt Seidman's (2013) three phase 60-90 minute, semi-structure interview process as my primary data collection. I will also conduct a document review of relevant writings, including submissions for National Board Certification. The duration of this study should take no more than 3-4 hours per participant over 3 months. **(148)**

Situate your proposed research within its field by citing a few prominent studies, articles, and/or books from the existing literature.

Research shows that 50% of teachers quit within the first five years (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; Simon & Moore Johnson, 2015). Importantly, turnover negatively impacts student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2013). Although some attrition is normal, it is not always healthy (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Meanwhile, teacher-leaders such as NBCTs are among our most experienced teachers and tend to have higher student achievement (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Petty et al., 2016). Therefore, focusing on teacher-leaders (Berry et al., 2013; Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015), I will use adult development lens of constructive-developmental theory

(Kegan, 1982, 1994) and Drago-Severson's (2016) Pillar Practices, (e.g. mentoring/teaming) as structures that may help experiences of flourishing for teachers who defied the odds and stayed in the classroom. Flourishing or *eudemonia* (Aristotle & Sachs, 2002) is important to developing strong, sustainable school communities where teachers stay and thrive (Cherkowski & Walker, 2014, 2016). **(149)**

Describe how you anticipate your study will contribute to theory, evidence, and/or practice in your field.

Contributions to practice include findings that will inform policy and educational leaders as to how to not only retain their *irreplaceable* teachers (Jacob et al., 2012) but also facilitate structures and relationships that can help them have experiences of flourishing throughout their careers. Importantly, ESSA identified strong teacher-leadership as a crucial lever to school change, and this study emphasizes understanding the experience of teacher-leaders at different phases of their career. Therefore, this study's contribution to theory is that it disrupts the teacher-as-widgit (Weisberg et al., 2009) paradigm and broadens the current, myopic narrative of teacher success defined by student test-scores alone (Murphy et al., 2013). To do so, this study introduces and explores the concept of flourishing as it harkens back to the original liberatory goal of schools to be "embryonic communities" (Dewey, 1915, p. 4) that inspire imagination (Greene, 1995) and community (hooks, 2013) even for teachers. **(150)**

Describe how your proposed study will benefit WCPSS and align with one or more of the district's objectives and strategies.

I selected WCPSS not only due to familiarity, but also my desire to give back to the district that raised me as a public-school student with high quality teachers. As I later discovered, WCPSS has had the highest number of National Board Certified teachers for the last nine years, and this study will seek to understand and highlight these tremendous efforts from WCPSS and discover new ways it can continue this support. Additionally, this study aligns with the human capital goal within the 2020 Strategic Plan "to identify, recruit, develop, and retain highly effective talent" (wcpss.net). Studies already show that the participant pool for this study (i.e., NBCT and >10 years experience) are the teachers we want to retain as experienced teachers not only decrease student absenteeism while increasing student achievement but also enhance collegiality among peers, an important factor to teacher retention (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). **(147)**

Describe your anticipated outcome, predictor, and control variables, as well as any instruments (e.g. surveys, equipment, procedures) you plan to use to collect new data.

The instruments for this qualitative in-depth interview study are three semi-structures interview protocols (see Appendix A Interview Protocol #1, Appendix B Interview Protocol #2, and Appendix C Interview Protocol #3). The anticipated outcome from these interviews, which will be recorded and transcribed with each participant's permission and signed consent, will be at last 36 hours of data. Through coding with NVivo, I will discern the meaning-making of how each participant describes and understands their experiences of flourishing, if any, throughout their career as teacher-leaders. **(84)**

Describe the research design and statistical analyses you plan to conduct.

This is a qualitative in-depth interview dissertation study (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). To analyze the 8-12 participant interviews (approximately 3.5-4 hours/participant), I will request informed consent to record and transcribe them verbatim. To analyze the data, I will use N*Vivo and do a first cycle of descriptive/open (emic) and theoretical coding (etic), followed with a second cycle of categorization and thematic grouping (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Then, I will adapt Seidman's (2013) narrative profiles to capture stories of participant's experiences. I will attend to descriptive validity by asking for verbatim transcription and take detailed notes of my observations during interviews. To address interpretive validity, I will use *member-checking* of the transcripts. Also, to attend to theoretical validity, I will write iterative memos paying attention to discrepant data (Maxwell, 2013). Finally, due to the small sample size, this study will only be generalizable to the sample—internal generalizability (Maxwell, 2013). **(150)**

Is your proposed study a single investigation or part of a larger research study?

This is a singular dissertation study, and it is a first step in a life-time research agenda of learning about public education in North Carolina and in the nation.

For this particular proposal, describe your source and amount of funding, if applicable.

Funding for this research is indirectly from a Dissertation Research Fellowship from the President's office, and I have two grants pending from Teachers College, Columbia University for \$6,000 and \$2,000 respectively to pay for transportation and transcription services. **(38)**

Appendix K

Teachers College IRB Approval Letter



Please be informed that as of the date of this letter, the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Teachers College, Columbia University has given full approval to your study, entitled “*RE-STORYING A PROFESSION TO FLOURISH: A QUALITATIVE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW STUDY WITH NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER-LEADERS*,” under **Expedited Review (Category (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.)** on 02/21/2017.

The approval is effective until **02/20/2018**.

The IRB Committee must be contacted if there are any changes to the protocol during this period. **Please note:** If you are planning to continue your study, a Continuing Review report must be submitted to either close the protocol or request permission to continue for another year. Please submit your report by **01/23/2018** so that the IRB has time to review and approve your report if you wish to continue your study. The IRB number assigned to your protocol is **17- 194**. Feel free to contact the IRB Office (212-678-4105 or accamilleri@gmail.com) if you have any questions.

Please note that your Consent form bears an official IRB authorization stamp and is attached to this email. Copies of this form with the IRB stamp must be used for your research work. Further, all research recruitment materials must include the study’s IRB-approved protocol number. You can retrieve a PDF copy of this approval letter as well as the stamped consent(s) and recruitment materials from the IRB Mentor site.

When your study ends, please visit the IRB Mentor site. Go to the Continuing Review tab and select “terminate” from the drop-down menu.

Best wishes for your research work.

Sincerely, Amy Camilleri IRB Administrator

Expedited Approval Notific

Appendix L

Sample Narrative Profile

Becoming a Teaching Fellow:

I'm the first person in our family to go to college, away to college, like, a couple of my siblings went to community college, but to go away and do that experience. But what I recognized is there wasn't money for that unless I made a way for myself, so I looked into Teaching Fellows because I loved teaching and I wanted to do that, I guess. And that was a great opportunity and I decided basically to go to the farthest school away from where I grew up. I had a visit to [University] and just there were seven or eight other people who were just really gung-ho about teaching and they had some folks there who actually had done their student teaching or were doing their student teaching at the time, they had professors, they had newbies like me, and all of those experiences I didn't feel like I was being hoodwinked about what teaching really meant.

Becoming a Teacher:

[At first, when I started teaching in Greensboro,] I was surviving. Those three years for me, I was teaching five classes and they had 20 kids, so I had a 113 or 114 students. But I would say probably the most difficult part is fitting everything in to a standard that I want it to meet. I mentioned earlier but I'm a person who likes to do things a certain way. I'm a very A-type personality. I'm a lot more flexible than I used to be but I definitely have a standard for myself and I would not stop until I have reached that standard. And it's unreasonable at times, and I actually do work myself into several ulcers yeah. And so I was out of school four days, so I'm getting better in recognizing that if I didn't change the way I interacted with work I was going to literally kill myself. I couldn't do that, right? And so I redefined how hard I was going to work. I work differently. I let some things take longer than they would have before, trying to find a more healthy balance with school. I did not [consider leaving]. I think it was because I had many commitment to the Teaching Fellows that for four years I had signed on that I would see it through.

Becoming National Board Certified and a Teacher-Leader:

And by the fourth year I loved it. I loved it. And I liked it a lot in the first three, but I loved it after the fourth one. I actually didn't consider doing anything else after that. After year three, a lot of the administrative things get easier, you remember to stand at the door, you know? [Chuckles] Doing class changes. All that stuff kind of becomes innate and you begin to enjoy what you're doing. So I think for me [earning National Board Certification] was a natural progression because I knew that I wanted to stay in the classroom, and at that point the governor's office was paying for getting it initially, so I thought it was a good opportunity. I did not pass the first time. I was shocked. When something comes easy for you and you think you're okay and you're like, "Oh, okay, that's cool. I think I'm fine," but then you don't pass, you have to become really self-reflective. The second time around I did that by myself, so it was really a solitary experience because honestly I was trying to recover from having failed. But once you kind of get past that part, it's really a growth experience and it became a whole lot easier to actually engage what I needed to do, which was look inward and identify where I wasn't meeting standards, where I was making mistakes, and what level of influence I could exert on the learning situation and student outcomes. And once I realized that part, it was sky's the limit,

right? It was a nonissue at that point. [Then, for] the renewal, actually we had just adopted to be the new [Magnet] school, and so the number of students I was teaching doubled overnight, basically. So from one year to the next, I went from 78 students to 160. And so that was actually the reason why I decided to flip my classroom. But in my professional growth experiences, you'll see that one of those was surrounding the flipped model, so actually while I was renewing I was also building and deploying an all-digital version of my traditional classroom. So it's kind of like once I get some space in my world and day job starts being less overwhelming, I find a way to make it more efficient. So the part about flipping my classroom was about I still had some students who weren't performing, so it was my job to figure out why, right? It was a problem to be solved that some of my students were still not being successful. As a professional, your job is to figure out why.

Teaching and Leading Today:

[Recently], I made a decision not to return to Riverdale High School, and so I told my principal that I was not planning to return. And I don't know if I alluded to this part, but we had an assistant principal who basically came in and disrespected the entire department. She steamrolled everybody. She left our department chair crying. Every time she met with her she was just so nasty and mean and unprofessional. I decided—I recognized that I could not continue to grow in an environment like that, so I actually made a decision to leave and I let my principal know. She said, "I have a colleague who is actually going to be opening a blended virtual high school." And she said, "You need to apply." And I said, "That sounds wonderful."

[Now,] I have no regrets . . . having created a model that worked extremely well, feeling empowered, when students were absent they could get caught up, when we got to the end of the school year if there were four or five seniors who weren't going to make it I just redeployed some new content or asked them to go back and do something they haven't done, I would never consider going back to the real-time-only model. Though it was rewarding and I enjoyed that and I craved that and that's been a hard transition to a blended environment, what I recognized is that I can't get students to that place and empower them to master all of the objectives if I'm doing it that way. Because the variable was time. If there was enough time and energy, then I think that all of the students where they needed to be, but because students changed so much. There are demands on their time. They work a lot. They've got a lot of other activities, maybe afterschool sports, all that kind of stuff. I recognized that the rigidity of a traditional schedule means that all of that really content stuff has to be supported in real time, and I would never go back to that because I can't be as effective, I can't be as efficient, I can't realize the type of work-life balance that I used to have—or that I have, excuse me—if I went back to a more traditional style of teaching.

Flourishing?

I do believe I flourish as a teacher because I am continuing to grow my skills to develop new content, to develop blended content, to learn new pedagogy as it relates to online versus traditional content. So I do flourish. I'm continuing to grow and I've grown in ways this past year that I've never considered before. Yeah, to be a part of something new, to understand or support a new high school model for our district and possibly for the state as well, that's really empowering. It's a lot of fun, it's exciting, and it makes me want to get up and go to work every day. Yeah, it's pretty cool

Appendix M

Teacher-Leader Participant Flourishing Vignettes and Table of Excerpts

Molly the Mother of Extremes. Molly, a white female math teacher with approximately 20 years of experience, described her flourishing as “rewarding and fulfilling” especially when she saw the “light-bulb” moment with a student. Her epithet emphasized the importance Molly put on “her kids” whether in her classroom or at home and her ability to “connect” with both high and low-level students or in her words “both extremes.” While she did leave teaching briefly to take care of her children when they were young, she also used this time to lead workshops across the state and coach other teachers. To her, finding a supportive environment where her colleagues are like “family” and leading for solutions of how to “motivate kids . . . to like math . . . to pick up a calculator” excited her in career.

Alice the Actress/Advocate. Alice, a white female English teacher with over 25 years of experience, explained flourishing for her is when she “found hope and joy in my classroom because of how my students reacted with each other.” For her, flourishing was not expansive but instead “growing healthily in my [flower/plant] pot.” Her self-described talent was “playing a role” until she figured out what to do, which was why I gave her the epithet of an actress. Interestingly, like many modern actors, Alice was also a major “advocate” for her students and even more recently for herself and her own well-being. Since she taught poorer and alternative schools in the beginning of her career, she explained that she looked for those “pockets” of struggling students in her most recent school and felt that’s where she found success to this day.

Danielle the Defender of Intellect. Danielle, a white female ESL teacher with about ten years of experience, described her own flourishing as “stimulated” while also seeing “fruits” of her efforts with her students’ success. As Department Chair and a curriculum writer, she led within and beyond her school walls and explained how she did not realize how “intellectually stimulating” teaching would be. Also, after she revealed her sexual identity to her students early in her career and then more recently led a “Safe-Zone” training for her peers, she explained how these experiences made her feel even more connected and less “isolated,” which she also needed in order to live the good life of teaching.

Saul the Steady Problem-Solver. Saul, a white, male English teacher with about twenty years of experience, described his own flourishing as the constant problem-solving he gets to do which helped him grow, or, in his words “to grow my skills to develop new content, to develop blended content, to learn new pedagogy.” Saul wanted to be remembered as the one who solved the problems before anyone even knew they existed. These aspirations led him to re-invent his teaching through a “flipped classroom” and by teaching at an experimental school that prioritizes the technology for a “blended” learning environment to meet students where they are: online. Interestingly, Saul was the youngest of his five siblings, and they all had perfect attendance while growing up. In fact, he said that his family “always joked growing up that breathing was as easy as going to school because we all loved school.” Saul explained his love of school continued to this day and is how believed he teaches, leads, and lives well.

Ella the Ethical Edutainer/Activist. Ella, a white female humanities teacher with over 25 years of experience, explained that her flourishing was in how she’s “evolved” and that

teaching gave her the “opportunity to grow and develop.” Ella’s leadership evolved from leading her classroom with “entertaining” lessons that helped her win her school’s first-year Teacher of the Year award as a beginning teacher to becoming a veteran who led state-wide teacher-activism. Her passion was doing “the best she can” for her students, and her dedicated work-ethic led to a documentary, recently released, about her career. She described teaching as “an addiction” and as “her first love,” but she also saw the lack of sustainability of her passion. She explained that her vision moving forward was to stay in teaching not only for her students but also to support her family.

Leigh the Students First Leader. Leigh, a white female English teacher with approximately 15 years of experience, described her own flourishing as a “stretch” and “balance” of her teaching and her leadership. Leigh’s passion for her student’s success was most abundantly obvious by the multiple, individualized student stories she shared. She also explained her commitment to teaching in that “there’s so many more kids out there that I need to reach and that I need to continue being my best.” Describing how recently Leigh’s also been delighted to have a new principal has really “pushed” her, Leigh explained “appreciated” how “she gave very specific ways to improve and I loved that.” For her, improving and “stretching” to grow for her students, first, was how she described her flourishing.

Patricia the Perseverant Pedagogue. Patricia, a white female Math teacher with approximately 15 years of experience, described her own flourishing as feeling accomplished and being “a very important part of the community.” From the beginning of her career, she raved about how well she “was prepared” pedagogically, and she believed that “for the ones that are really the cream of the crop, it starts in their classroom and the leadership opportunities happen because of that.” For her, excelling in her classroom was imperative before she would agree to take on roles she later agreed to like becoming the mentorship coordinator where she could help other new teachers grow and, potentially, flourish too.

Chris the Crusader for Kids. Chris, a white male Math teacher with approximately ten years of experience, explained teaching not only as “fun” because of the relationships he built with students but also because he liked to “embrace like opportunities to go out on a limb and try something that’s unproven.” Overall, Chris said it was important to “convince people that teaching is awesome,” so even though he had to scale back his involvement in the community, he still believed it is most important that he is a “solid teacher” to whom students will return, remember, and maintain a relationship with even after they graduate. To him, being a “solid teacher” for his students was vital to living the good life.

Table of Teacher-Leader Descriptions of Flourishing

Participant	How, if at all, do describe flourishing in your career?	Interpretation
Danielle (approximately 10 years of experience)	“Because, yeah, first flourishing, like for me personally, I want to be stimulated, but I don’t want to be stimulated but then give classes that are terrible that no one’s getting anything out of. I need to see some fruits, I suppose. [Chuckles] In terms of kids asking questions and doing some outside research on their own and stuff like that... hopefully there won’t be any huge changes, like if our number of immigrant students takes a dive or if let’s say a critical mass of colleagues that I have great respect for decided to leave and I felt kind of isolated. That might make me be less flourishing.”	-Stimulated -Success -Connection -Colleagues -Relationship -Impact
Chris (approximately 10 years of experience)	“A successful career to me is trying to do your job really well every day, and I think for the most part I do that... I think I’m willing to continue to try to find new ways to impact problems that haven’t been solved yet. I think I embrace leadership opportunities, but more than that I think I embrace opportunities to go out on a limb and try something that’s unproven. So I think that is one reason I would describe my career as flourishing and hopefully it will continue to. I feel like I really embrace trying to convince people that teaching is awesome.”	-Problem-Solving -Leadership -Impact -Success
Leigh (approximately 15 years of experience)	“I think when I see, for me especially, see my students loving to read, when they find a book and they’re so excited to talk about that book. That’s from the English perspective. . . . that’s who I am and I think that’s why I went into teaching, because I’m always trying to better myself. I’m always trying to make sure...I’m always looking at what I need to do that needs improvement. . .I need to stretch myself in leadership roles and I’ve figured out...I was able to kind of test different roles and figure out where I was the best leader and where I could be the best, where I could kind of balance the best as well.”	-Impact -Growth -Stretch -Leadership -Balance
Patricia (approximately 15 years of experience)	“I do. I hope it doesn’t change. I feel like each year I feel successful in different ways whether it’s content, delivery to students, helping students get math credits in college. I do Math Honors Society and I get...I have kids who actually come and do math for fun, like we have...it’s just for fun. So I feel accomplished and I hope that that continues. Again, taking on some new leadership roles this year, I’ll be interested to see how that works. And just continuing to feel like that I’m a very important part of the community, I hope that that continues.”	-Success -Impact -Growth -Accomplished -Leadership -Growth -Community
Molly (approximately 20 years of experience)	“I want [my students] to ask why. I want them to be inquisitive and take care. And I’m the kind of teacher that I’m not going to just say, “Here’s the formula. I’m going to show you where the formula came from and why it is what it is.” And to see those kids that care and want to learn and know why, that’s that rewarding part. Like I said, seeing that light bulb come on and they want to get it, and then it’s like, “Oh, that makes so much sense!” And I’m like, “Yes!” So to me that’s the rewarding, the fulfilling, in a nutshell kind of an example of what [flourishing] means to me. . . Yes, overall. I mean, there are definitely days when I feel very beat down, but yes, I would consider myself that I’m staying and I am flourishing.”	-Impact -Fulfilling -Rewarding -Success

Saul (approximately 20 years of experience)	“I do believe I flourish as a teacher because I am continuing to grow my skills to develop new content, to develop blended content, to learn new pedagogy as it relates to online versus traditional content. So I do flourish. I’m continuing to grow and I’ve grown in ways this past year that I’ve never considered before. Yeah, to be a part of something new, to understand or support a new high school model for our district and possibly for the state as well, that’s really empowering. It’s a lot of fun, it’s exciting, and it makes me want to get up and go to work every day. Yeah, it’s pretty cool.”	-Growth -Problem-Solving -Connection -Leadership -Empowering
Ella (approximately 25 years of experience)	“I look back at the span of my career, like the opportunities to hone my practice, write curriculum. Biggest things I got to do as the result of teaching is travel, and that has been amazing. I can go to Japan. I go to Montana. I had to go to Europe. I just got back from Peru. I got to go to Chicago, AP training. Yeah, I mean, I’ve had a lot of opportunity to grow and develop. To me that’s what flourishing means, is you evolved. I have definitely evolved as the result of teaching. I think at a much higher level than most professionals.”	Growth Evolved
Alice (approximately 25 years of experience)	“The sense of hope of that students could find a way to work together despite differences, and I think even now that’s where I find joy and that’s where I flourish today. Like the day after the election this year, I found hope and joy in my classroom because of how my students reacted with each other. So I don’t think that has changed even in 25 years. I don’t know that flourish is the right word because when I think “flourish” I think expanding and I feel like spreading out, and I don’t know that I do that enough. I think I am in my own little pot growing healthily. I don’t know that I’m spreading like kudzu. I’m not flourishing in that regard. [Chuckles] But I think I get my fertilizer and I get my water and I am growing healthily in my pot, but I am kind of staying in my own little pot.”	Success Impact Joy Growth